

# Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten

.....  
2021-2023 Biennium Legislative Report



Oregon Department of  
**Early Learning  
and Care**



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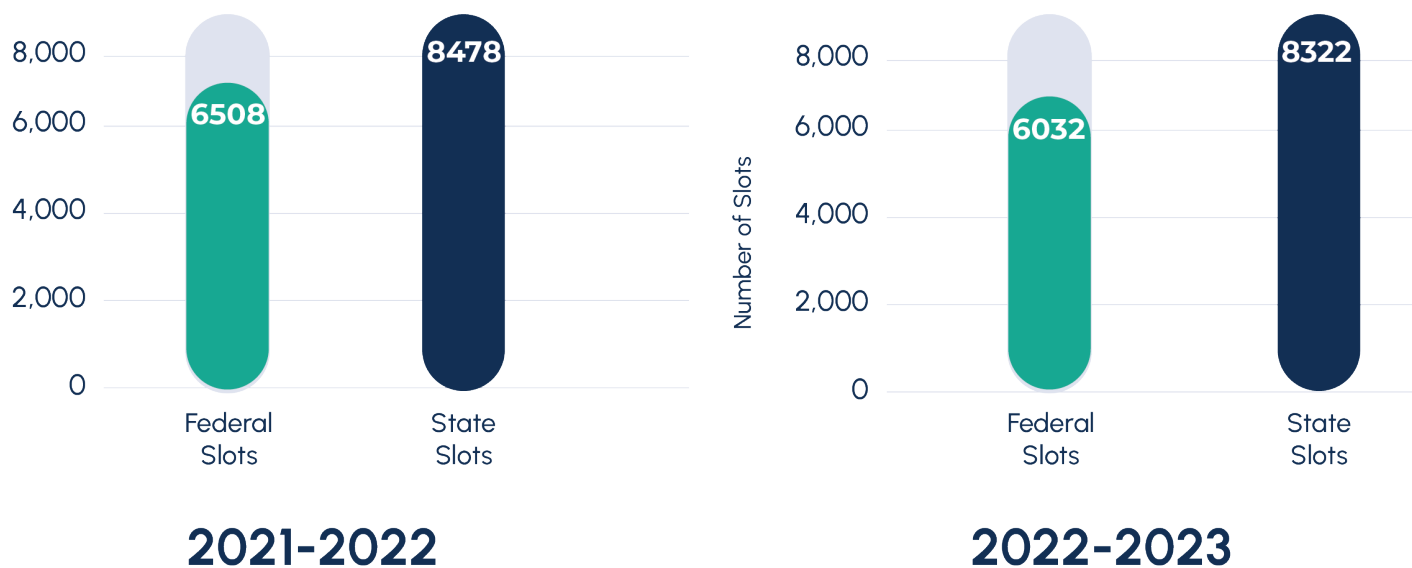
## Executive Summary

Pursuant to the requirements set forth in Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 329.200, the Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) hereby submits the biennial legislative report for the Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK) program. This report covers the 2021–2023 biennium, when the OPK program was administered by the Early Learning Division at the Oregon Department of Education and includes data and analysis on enrollment, program expenditures, state allocations, and the implementation of statutory and programmatic requirements. Additionally, the report provides salary and education data for personnel delivering OPK services, as well as recommendations for enhancing program administration and evaluation.

OPK is a state-funded comprehensive early care and education initiative that includes both preschool and prenatal-to-age-three (P-3) services. These services are aligned with the federal Head Start and Early Head Start standards and are specifically designed for children and families who meet federal income and categorical eligibility criteria as outlined in the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). OPK is required to operate in accordance with these standards under the authority of Senate Bill 524 (1987).

In the 2021–2023 biennium, the Oregon Legislature allocated \$268,764,456 to the OPK program. This funding enabled service delivery to a total of 8,478 children and their families across the state. Cumulative enrollment totaled 8,478 children during the 2021–2022 program year and 8,322 in 2022–2023 (see Figure 1). Approximately two-thirds of children served came from families with incomes between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL), while the remaining one-third came from families with incomes below 100% of the FPL.

**Figure 1.** State (OPK and OPKP-3) and Federal (Head Start and Early Head Start) Slots



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

During the 2023 legislative session, House Bill 3535 formally renamed "Oregon Prekindergarten" to "OPK," reflected the expanded scope of the program to include prenatal-to-three services. This expansion was made possible through the Student Success Act of 2019, which established the Early Learning Account and significantly increased funding for infant and toddler care. As a result, the prenatal-to-three component of OPK (formerly Oregon Early Head Start) expanded from 64 funded slots in 2019 to 1,154 in 2020-2021 and 1,415 in 2023.



## Introduction

In 1987, the Oregon Legislature passed legislation directing the Oregon Department of Education to implement a preschool initiative designed to expand Head Start services to more families statewide. This initiative, now known as OPK, has grown to include center-based and home-based services for children from the prenatal period through age five.

This report responds to legislative requirements by detailing the implementation of OPK during the 2021–2023 biennium. It includes comprehensive data and analysis on the following:

- (a) Enrollment disaggregated by family income and priority populations;
- (b) Cost per child served;
- (c) State financial support allocated to the program;
- (d) Systemic efforts by the Early Learning Division to assess and improve program effectiveness, including professional learning supports and coaching initiatives;
- (e) Improvements to the administration and evaluation of OPK;
- (f) Salary, educational attainment, and turnover rates among lead preschool teachers and teaching assistants;
- (g) Implementation of programmatic requirements such as family engagement, parent leadership, and home visiting services, with supporting data; and
- (h) The impact of recent updates to the Head Start Program Performance Standards on OPK programs and the families they serve.

When available, data are presented for both the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 program years. In some cases, differences in data collection methods between the two years may limit the comparability or completeness of specific datasets.

OPK remains a cornerstone of the state's early learning system, promoting equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and family services. It aims to address systemic disparities by supporting the comprehensive development and well-being of children and families who are most impacted by poverty and adversity.

## OPK Overview

The OPK and Oregon Prenatal Prekindergarten: Prenatal to Three (OPKP–3) programs are state-funded initiatives designed to promote school readiness and family well-being for young children—particularly those from low-income families. These programs are implemented in alignment with the federal Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and are administered under the statutory authority established by Senate Bill 524 (1987).

OPK and OPKP–3 serve families with children from the prenatal stage through age five by providing high-quality, culturally responsive early childhood education, health care, nutrition, and comprehensive family support services. The overarching goal of these programs is to ensure children are developmentally prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond, while families are engaged, empowered, and supported in their child's growth and learning.

## Program Scope and Mission

OPK is a comprehensive early childhood education program focused on families experiencing the impacts of poverty, including but not limited to homelessness, food insecurity, and chronic stress. The mission of OPK is to foster school readiness by supporting the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of children from birth to age five.

## OPK Preschool Services (Ages 3–5)

### Key Features

- **Education:** OPK preschool services emphasize kindergarten readiness by cultivating curiosity and a love of learning. The curriculum promotes development in language, literacy, mathematics, science, inquiry, and social-emotional skills.
- **Health Services:** Comprehensive services include medical, dental, nutrition, and mental health supports. Programs conduct developmental screenings, offer referrals, and assist families in accessing needed community health resources.
- **Parent Engagement:** Families are engaged through monthly parent education sessions on topics relevant to parenting, child development, and family well-being.
- **Parent Leadership:** Each program operates a Parent Policy Council, which empowers parents to participate in program governance and decision-making. Parents are also supported in advocacy efforts at the state level, including legislative engagement through the Oregon Head Start Association.
- **Family Support and Home Visiting:** Family advocates provide individualized parenting education, assist families in goal-setting and stability planning, and connect families with mental health, housing, and crisis support services. This includes ongoing support even in cases involving child welfare or family separation.
- **Education-Focused Home Visiting and Conferences:** Educational home visits are used to discuss each child's developmental progress, share screening results, and collaboratively address concerns related to potential delays or disabilities.
- **Inclusive Environments:** OPK programs support inclusive classrooms for children with disabilities, ensuring access to the same learning environments as typically developing peers. Programs coordinate with Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) providers to deliver individualized educational services and assist parents in navigating special education processes and rights.

### Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility for OPK services is based on the following:

- **Income:** Families with incomes at or below the federal poverty level (FPL). Adjustments are made for housing cost burdens—families who spend more than 30% of their income on housing may have that cost deducted from their total income for eligibility purposes.
- **Categorical Eligibility:** Children who are in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or receiving public assistance (e.g., SNAP, TANF, or OHP) are categorically eligible, regardless of income.

- **Other Risk Factors:** Families facing adversity—including domestic violence, parental incarceration, substance use disorder, or child welfare involvement—may also qualify based on demonstrated need.

## Service Models

- **Center-Based:** Children attend a licensed center with structured classroom instruction.
- **Part-Day, Part-Year:** At least 428 hours annually over a minimum of nine months.
- **Extended Day:** At least 1,020 hours annually over a minimum of nine months.
- **Home-Based:** Services delivered through home visits, during which trained staff support child development, coach parents, and set goals.
- **Locally Designed Options (LDOs):** Hybrid models that combine part-week center-based instruction with regular home visits to provide flexibility and individualized support.

## OPK Prenatal to Three Services (OPKP–3 / Oregon Early Head Start)

The OPKP–3 program, formerly known as Oregon Early Head Start, serves pregnant individuals and children from birth to age three. These services are aligned with Head Start standards but are tailored to meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers, while supporting prenatal health and parenting capacity.

### Key Features

- **Infant and Toddler Education:** Focuses on foundational early development including language acquisition, motor skills, cognitive growth, and emotional regulation.
- **Parent Education and Support:** Provides coaching and training on early child development, nurturing practices, and home learning strategies to support parenting confidence and skill.
- **Health Services:** Includes prenatal care for pregnant individuals, developmental screenings for infants and toddlers, and referrals to health and dental services.
- **Family Support:** Assists families in accessing housing, employment, behavioral health services, and public benefits—laying the groundwork for family stability and long-term success.

### Eligibility

Eligibility criteria mirror those of OPK Preschool, with services targeted to:

Pregnant individuals meeting income or categorical eligibility.

Families with children under age three who meet OPK Preschool eligibility standards.

## Service Models

- **Center-Based:** Full-day, full-year programming (minimum of 1,380 hours annually over at least 11 months).
- **Home-Based:** Weekly home visits year-round, designed to support the family's goals and strengthen the child's development.
- **Locally Designed Options:** Hybrid models incorporating classroom experiences and home visits. Some programs close during the summer, but all maintain a full-year service commitment.

OPK and OPKP–3 play an essential role in addressing educational and social inequities for Oregon's most vulnerable children and families. These programs support early learning, enhance school readiness,

and provide comprehensive, family-centered services. By focusing on early intervention and long-term engagement, OPK helps disrupt cycles of poverty and lays a foundation for improved academic, social, and health outcomes across generations.

## Funding and Program Breakdown

OPKP-3 programs are sustained through significant state investments aimed at advancing equitable early childhood outcomes. In the 2021–2023 biennium, the total state allocation for these programs was \$309.15. million, supporting a range of grantees and program types serving children from birth through age five and their families.

### State Budget Allocation (2021–2023 Biennium)

#### Total State Investment: \$309,152,557.31

This funding supported both preschool-age and prenatal-to-three services. When combined with federal Head Start investments, the overall funding landscape across Oregon for Head Start and Early Head Start services totaled \$309,152,557.31. The breakdown below includes both OPK and federally funded slots, demonstrating the full picture of Head Start programming in Oregon.

### Grantee Allocations

#### Program Slot Distribution and Cost Efficiency

Grantee	2021-2023 Allocation
Albina Head Start	\$24,766,571.02
Clackamas County Children's Commission	\$16,813,087.95
Clackamas ESD Prekindergarten	\$7,507,542.80
Community Action – Marion & Polk Counties	\$13,345,956.44
Community Action – Washington County	\$16,736,978.86
Community Action Team	\$7,842,415.75
Community Services Consortium	\$1,695,383.82
Eastern Oregon Head Start	\$4,328,679.04
Family Building Blocks	\$3,651,984.00
Head Start of Harney County	\$1,877,004.40
Head Start of Lane County	\$15,939,408.07



Grantee	2021-2023 Allocation
Head Start of Yamhill County	\$8,321,021.65
Kidco Head Start	\$6,646,807.08
Klamath Family Head Start	\$9,463,285.90
Malheur County Child Development Center	\$3,636,225.27
Mid-Columbia Children's Council	\$4,930,985.60
Mt. Hood Community College Head Start	\$22,973,975.25
Neighborhood House, Inc.	\$7,713,979.44
NeighborImpact Head Start	\$18,547,173.08
North Central ESD Early Education	\$637,881.88
Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC)	\$34,364,504.64
Oregon State University Child Development Center	\$1,711,351.84
Portland Public Schools Head Start	\$13,392,147.96
Salem-Keizer Head Start Prekindergarten	\$12,890,155.36
South Coast Head Start	\$8,616,480.07
Southern Oregon Child and Family Council	\$16,898,991.27
The Children's Learning Center	\$4,618,196.08
Umatilla-Morrow Head Start	\$10,810,758.22
United Community Action Network Head Start	\$7,883,944.57
Grand Ronde Tribal Early Head Start	\$589,680.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$309,152,557.31</b>

Program	Number of Slots	% of Total	Allocated Funding
Head Start (Ages 3–5)	7,330	84%	\$259,604,564.68
Early Head Start (Prenatal–Age 3)	1,399	16%	\$49,547,992.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,729</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$309,152,557.31</b>

Note: All programs left funding in their state accounts for services not provided. Most of the unspent funding was due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., closed classrooms, staffing shortages etc.)

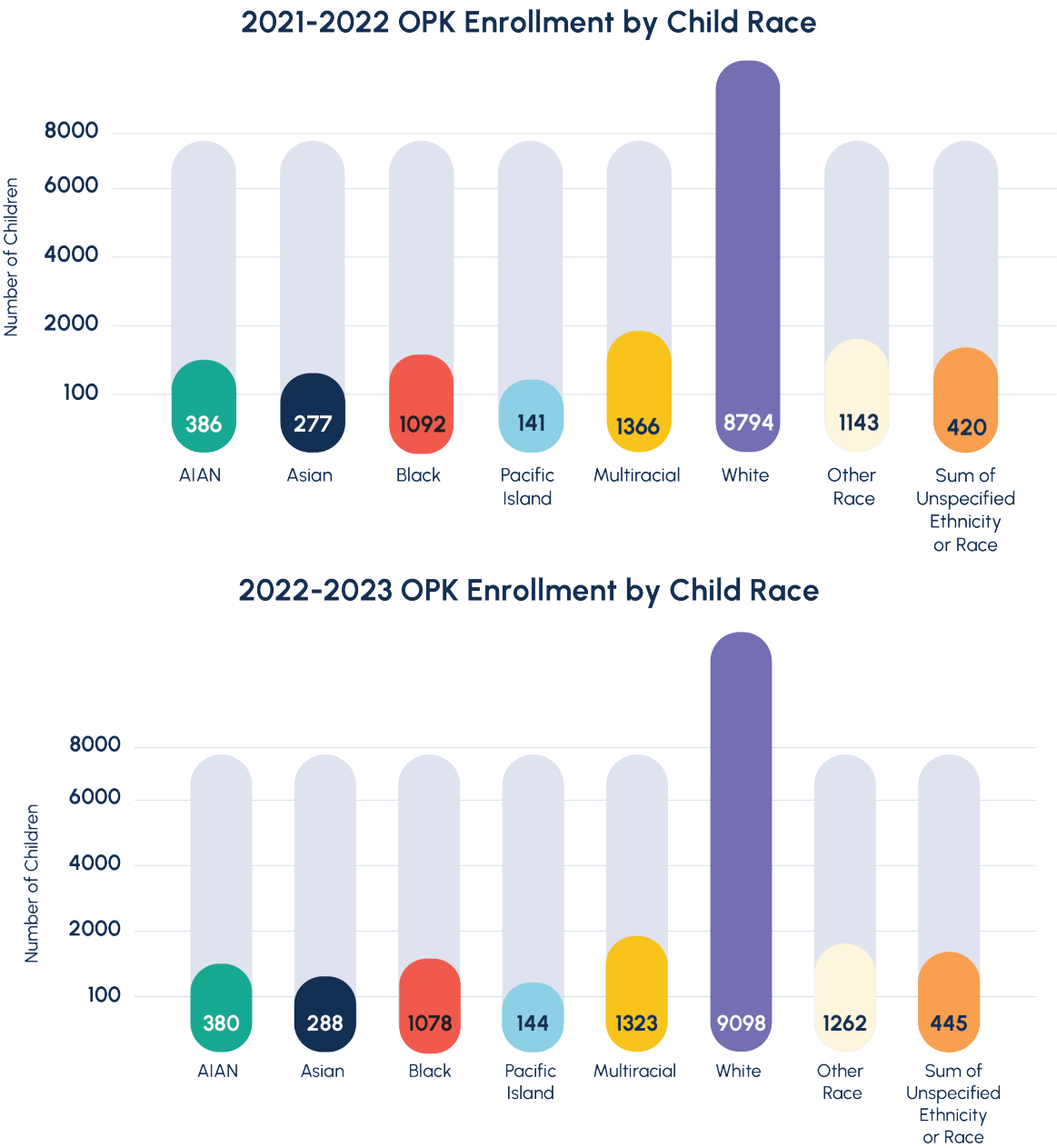
This distribution demonstrates a strategic focus on preschool services while ensuring robust support for prenatal to age three programming, which lays the foundation for long-term educational, health, and developmental outcomes.



# Who OPK Serves – Children and Families

OPK reaches some of Oregon's most underserved and systemically disadvantaged communities. These families often face overlapping barriers that can include poverty, homelessness, mental health challenges, and limited English proficiency. OPK's wraparound model serves both child and family, creating lasting pathways out of adversity. For information about the race/ethnicity of children enrolled in OPK see Figure 2. For other information about children enrolled in OPK, see Appendix.

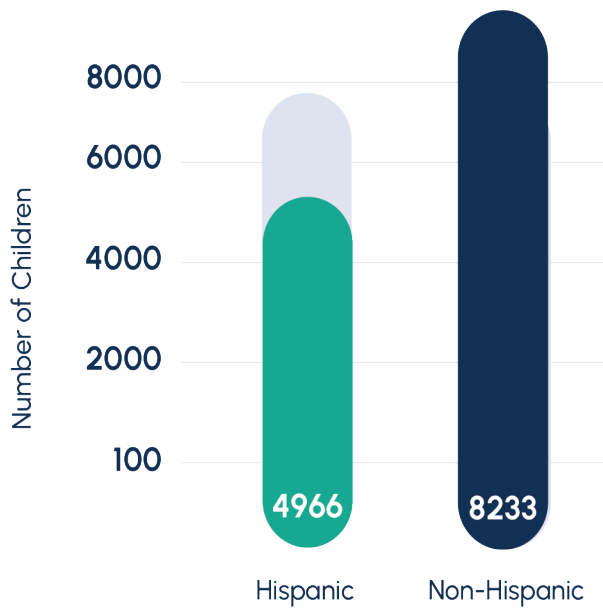
Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity of Children Enrolled in OPK



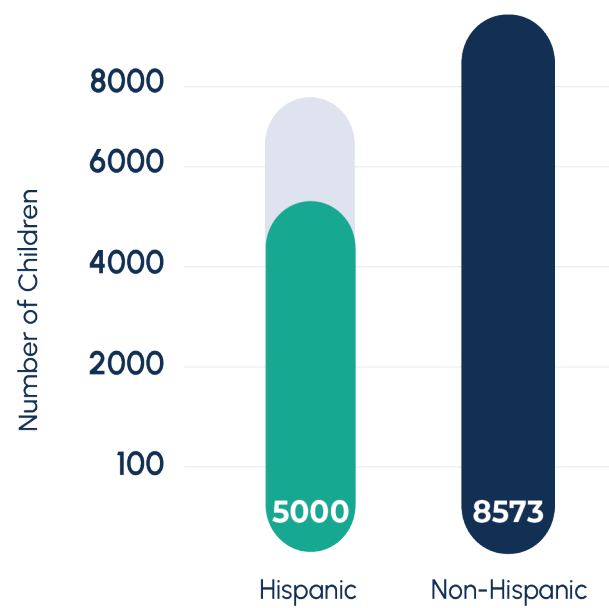
**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

## 2021-2022 OPK Enrollment by Child Ethnicity



## 2022-2023 OPK Enrollment by Child Ethnicity



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

## Eligibility and Enrollment Procedures

### Family Enrollment & Support Process

Because many OPK families have experienced significant challenges, OPK staff take intentional time to meet with each family during enrollment. Using trauma-informed practices, staff create a safe and welcoming environment where families can share sensitive information. This helps enrollment specialists or family services staff identify immediate needs and connect families to appropriate supports.

During the enrollment interview, families are introduced to their preferred site location, classroom schedule, and program model. They also receive key information about their child's first day, including the names of their assigned Teacher and Home Visitor.

As part of this meeting, the staff member conducting the intake makes notes in the family's file. These notes—visible to the assigned Family Service Home Visitor—highlight any needs or concerns expressed by the parent. The Home Visitor then follows up with the family to schedule their first family support home visit, which focuses on better understanding the family's unique situation. From there, the Home Visitor begins connecting the family to relevant services, which may include support for housing, utility bills, English language learning, education, or employment.

In addition, the classroom teacher will reach out to schedule the first educational home visit. During this visit, required developmental screenings are conducted and individualized educational goals for the child are established.

## Eligibility Process Overview

All information below is verified in order to establish eligibility for each family.

- Program staff are required to:
  - Conduct **in-person interviews** with families (or phone interviews if in-person is not feasible).
  - **Verify eligibility information** and maintain appropriate documentation.

## Age Requirements

- **Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten:** Serves **infants and toddlers under age 3**, unless transitioning to Oregon Prekindergarten.
- **Oregon Prekindergarten:** Serves children who are **at least age 3** by the local school district's cutoff date and **not yet age-eligible for public school**.

## Eligibility Criteria

A pregnant woman or child is eligible if **any** of the following conditions are met (see figure 3 for the children enrolled in OPK by income level and categorical eligibility):

- Family income is **at or below the federal poverty line**;
- Family is **eligible for or would be eligible for public assistance** (e.g., TANF, SNAP)
- The child is **homeless**;
- The child is in **foster care**.

## Allowances for Additional Enrollment

- Up to **10%** of enrollment may be allocated to children who do not meet the standard eligibility criteria but would **benefit from program services**.
- An additional **35% of participants** may come from families earning **below 130% of the poverty line**, provided the program:
  - Prioritizes and documents outreach to **eligible families first**;
  - Maintains policies to ensure children who meet standard eligibility are served before others.

Programs enrolling families between **100% and 130% of the poverty line** must report:

- How they are meeting the needs of **low-income, homeless, and foster children**;
- Detailed **outreach and enrollment procedures**;
- **Enrollment data** for the current and previous year;
- Eligibility status of children on the **waiting list**.

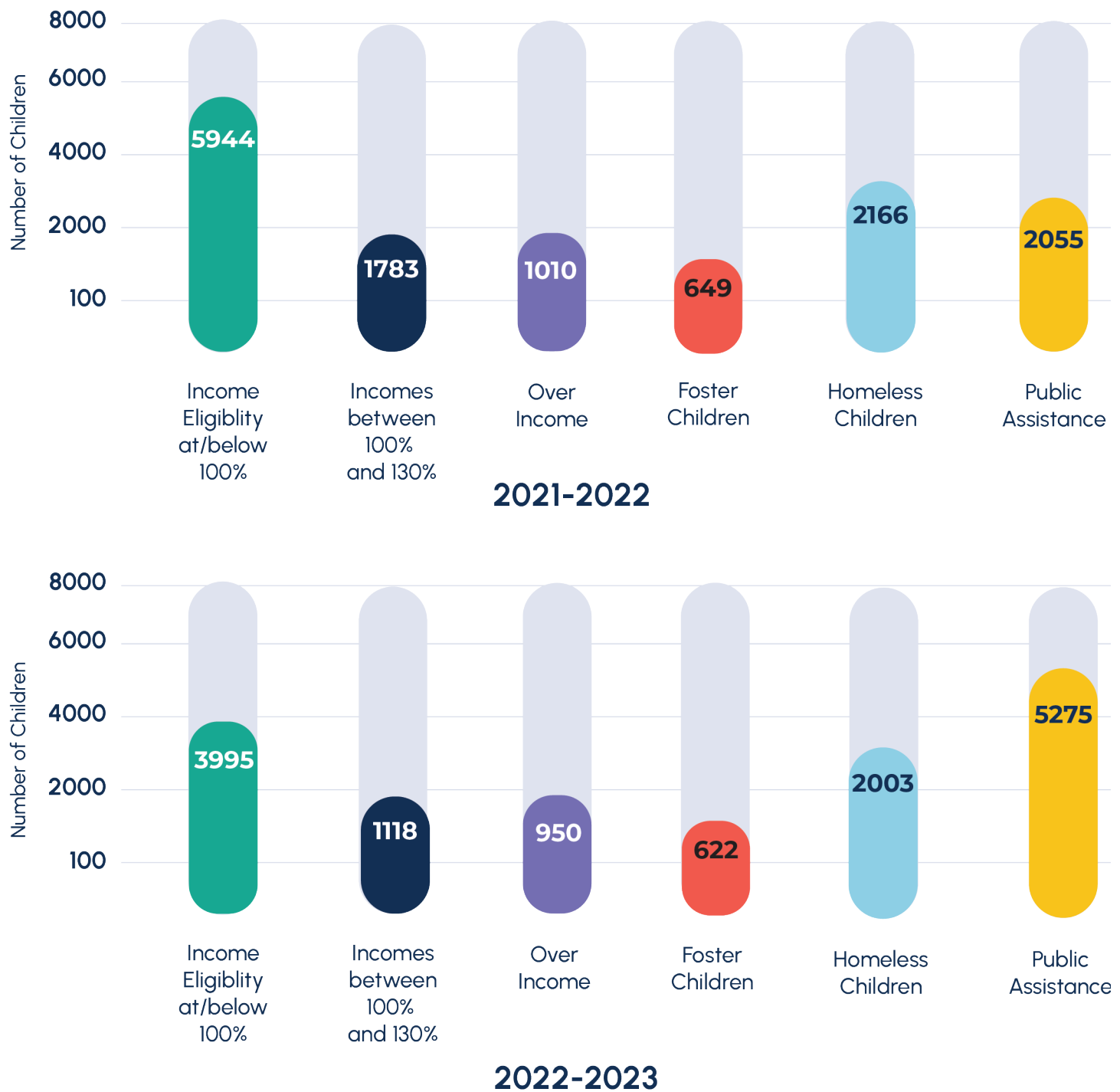
## Tribal Program Provisions

- Tribal programs may consider **any child or pregnant woman within their service area eligible**, regardless of income, as long as age requirements are met.
- Tribes operating both Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten and Oregon Prekindergarten programs may **reallocate funding between the two** at any time during the grant year to respond to changes in need. This will not affect future funding levels.



## Populations Served

**Figure 3.** Children Enrolled in OPK by Income Level and Categorical Eligibility



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

## Low-Income Families

Families at or below the federal poverty line face significant barriers to accessing early education. OPK provides free, high-quality early learning environments that promote school readiness, giving these children a strong start while allowing caregivers to maintain employment or pursue education.

## Families Experiencing Homelessness or Housing Instability

OPK is a stabilizing force, offering consistent learning environments and helping families navigate housing, utility assistance, and other essential services.

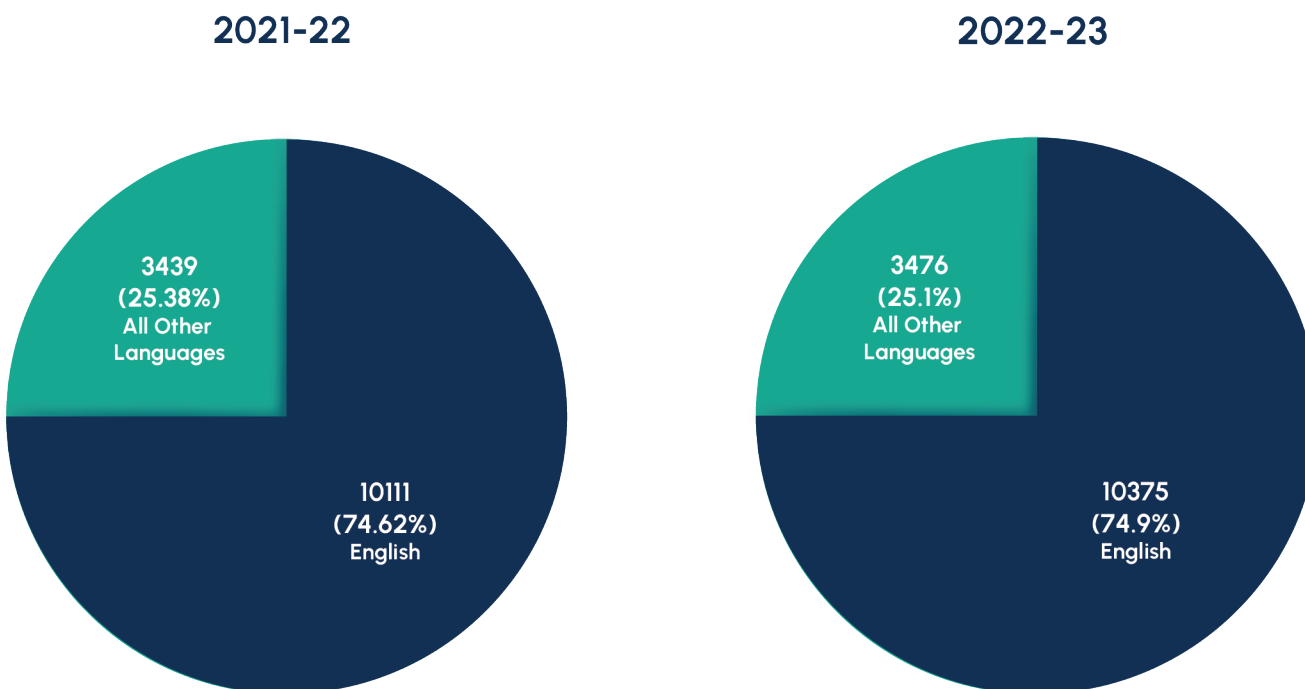
## Families Affected by Substance Use or Mental Health Needs

OPK connects families to mental health and addiction recovery resources, while also supporting children through trauma-informed educational practices.

## Families with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Many OPK programs provide bilingual instruction and family engagement strategies that honor linguistic and cultural diversity. LEP families are supported in accessing services, understanding their rights, and advocating for their children. For information about the languages spoken by OPK children and staff see figures 4 through 6.

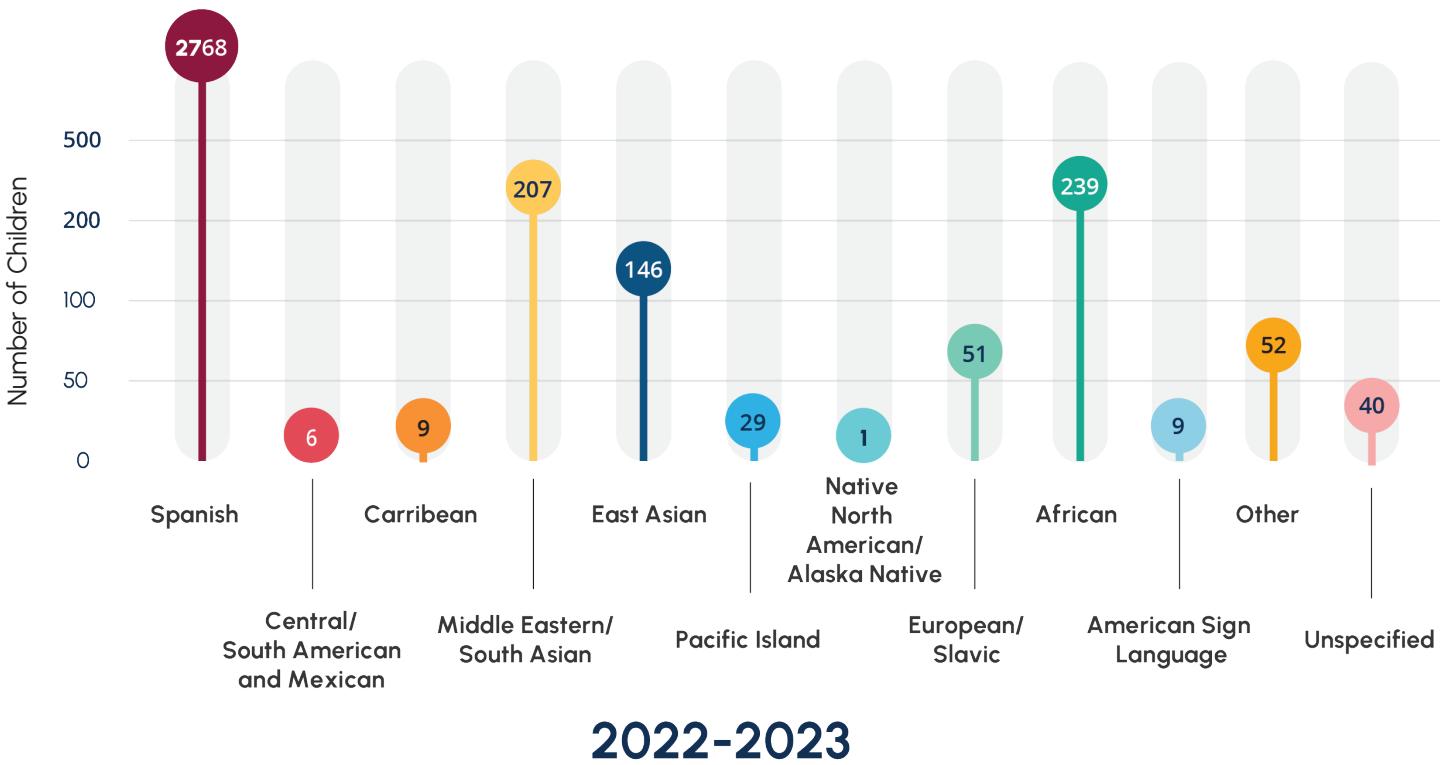
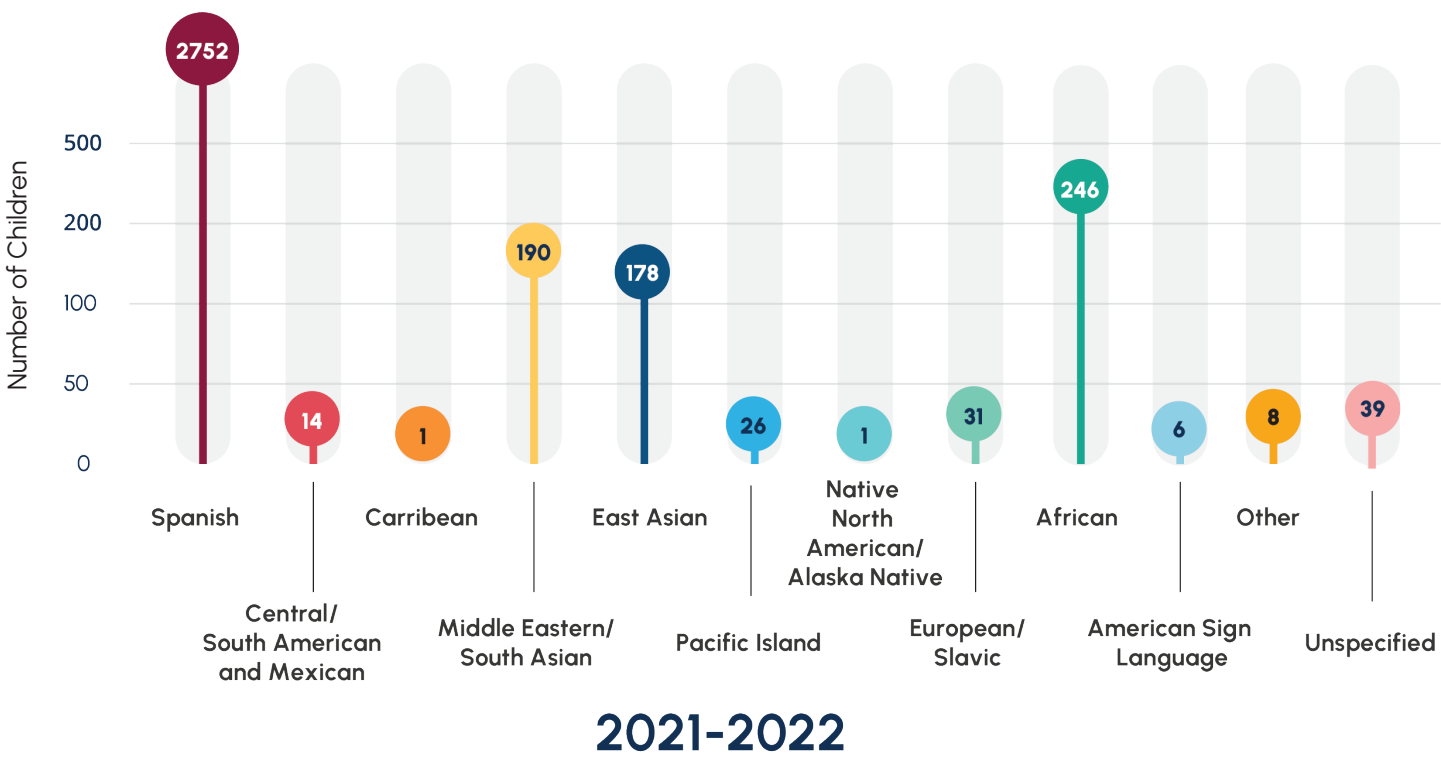
**Figure 4.** Home language for children enrolled in OPK



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

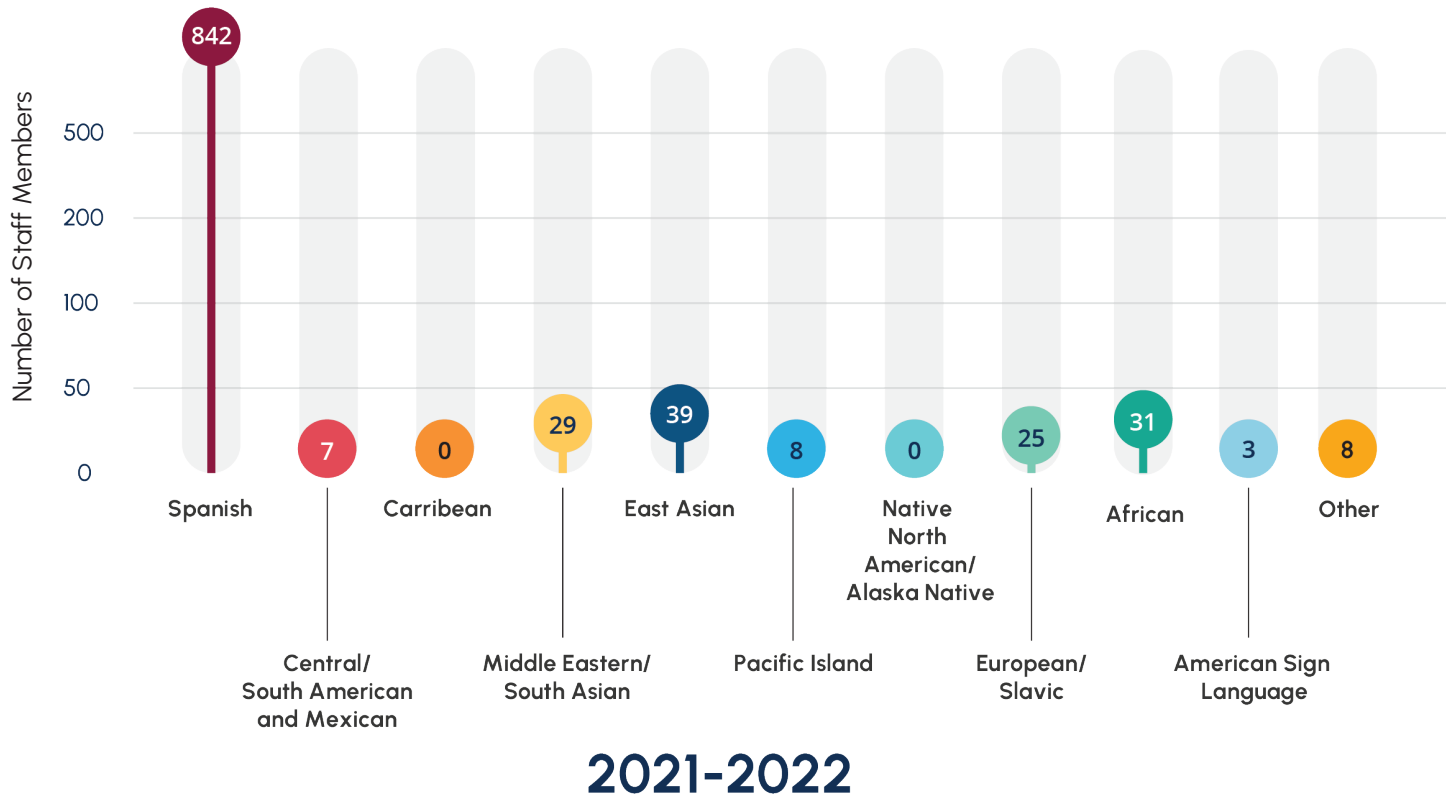
**Figure 5.** Children's Home Languages (Other than English)



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

**Figure 6.** Staff languages (other than English)



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

## **Inclusive Practices for Children Receiving IDEA Services in Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten**

Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK) programs are committed to inclusive, high-quality early childhood education for all children, including those eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). OPK partners closely with local early intervention (Part C) and early childhood special education (Part B) providers to ensure that children with developmental delays or disabilities receive the services and supports they need in the least restrictive environment. This includes integrating children with disabilities into regular classroom settings and home-based programs alongside their typically developing peers, allowing for enriched peer interactions and greater access to the full range of OPK learning experiences.

OPK staff work collaboratively with families, specialists, and service providers to ensure that Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are implemented effectively. Teachers and Home Visitors receive training in inclusive practices and differentiated instruction to meet each child's unique developmental and learning needs. The goal is not only to provide access but to foster full participation, build on children's strengths, and promote school readiness in a setting that values diversity and equity for all learners.

## **Inclusive Practices for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma and Express Mental Health Related Learning Challenges**

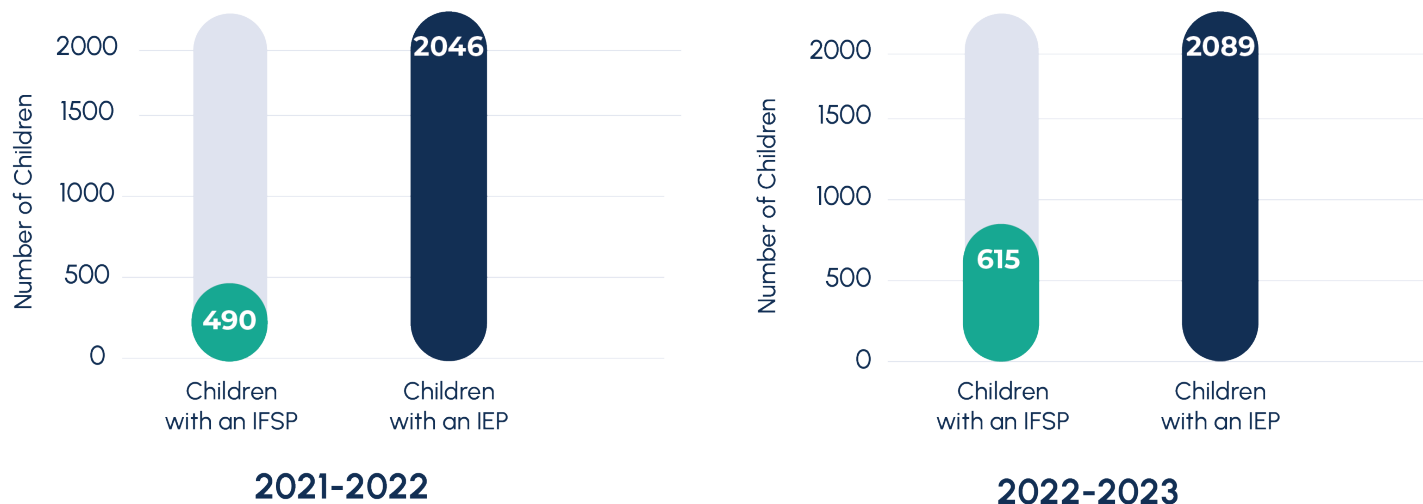
Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK) recognizes that mental health is a critical component of a child's overall development and school readiness. OPK integrates mental health supports into all aspects of programming, focusing on the social and emotional well-being of both children and families. Mental health professionals are embedded in the program structure, working alongside teachers, home visitors, and family service staff to promote nurturing, responsive environments that support healthy development and strengthen parent-child relationships.

OPK staff receive training in trauma-informed care, early childhood mental health, and strategies to recognize and respond to behavioral or emotional concerns. When additional support is needed, OPK mental health consultants collaborate with families and staff to create individualized plans, offer referrals, and connect families to community-based mental health services. These services are designed to be preventive, culturally responsive, and family-centered, ensuring that children receive the support they need to thrive both in the classroom and at home (see figure 7 on the next page).





**Figure 7.** Children with an IFSP or IEP



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

## Family Engagement

Family engagement is a foundational element of the OPK program. Central to this engagement is the Family Partnership Agreement, a formal document that establishes a collaborative, goal-oriented relationship between OPK staff and each enrolled family. This mutual commitment ensures that both parties work together to support the child's developmental, educational, and overall well-being.

The agreement outlines the shared responsibilities and expectations for participation and engagement, recognizing families as essential partners in their child's early learning journey.

### Key Components of the Family Partnership Agreement

#### 1. Family-Centered Goal Setting

Each agreement includes personalized, family-specific goals developed collaboratively by parents and OPK staff. These goals may address the child's educational development as well as broader family needs, such as housing stability, health, employment, financial wellness, or parenting skills. Goals are designed to be measurable, achievable, and aligned with each family's unique circumstances.

#### 2. Parent Participation

Families are encouraged to play an active role in the program. Expected forms of involvement include:

- Attending parent-teacher conferences
- Participating in classroom or center-based volunteer opportunities
- Engaging in parenting workshops and training sessions
- Supporting learning at home through activities like reading, practicing skills introduced in class, and reinforcing positive behavior

Active parent involvement has been shown to strengthen school readiness and long-term academic success.

### 3. OPK Responsibilities and Family Support

OPK programs commit to providing a range of services that support both the child and the family. These include:

- High-quality early education tailored to the child's developmental stage
- Health and developmental screenings (e.g., vision, hearing, dental)
- Connections to essential community resources such as housing assistance, food security programs, and healthcare
- Access to parenting support, skill-building resources, and mental health services

This integrated approach ensures that families receive comprehensive support during their child's critical early years.

### 4. Communication and Collaboration

Regular, open communication is key to a successful partnership. OPK maintains consistent contact with families through:

- Ongoing updates about the child's progress
- Scheduled home visits
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Informational sessions and workshops

This continuous engagement fosters trust, transparency, and shared decision-making.

### 5. Confidentiality and Respect

All interactions and information shared within the Family Partnership Agreement are held in strict confidence. OPK programs are committed to treating families with dignity and respect, honoring cultural and individual differences, and recognizing the strengths that each family brings.

### 6. Child Development and School Readiness

The agreement emphasizes shared responsibility for the child's growth. Parents are supported in fostering developmentally appropriate learning at home and contributing to strategies that enhance school readiness, positive behavior, and social-emotional well-being.

### 7. Referrals and Community Connections

Families receive assistance in accessing a wide range of community services, including:

Physical and mental health services

Social services (e.g., housing, food, utility assistance)

Employment training and adult education opportunities

These wraparound supports enhance family stability and promote positive child outcomes.

### 8. Progress Reviews and Updates

The Family Partnership Agreement is reviewed and updated regularly—typically every six to twelve months—to monitor progress toward goals, reflect changes in family circumstances, and ensure continued alignment with the family's needs and priorities.

## **Family Choice in OPK**

OPK places family choice at the center of its program design. Recognizing that families are the primary decision-makers in their children's lives, OPK emphasizes flexibility, individualized services, and responsive supports to meet the diverse needs of enrolled families.

### **Enrollment Process and Family-Centered Approach**

#### **Application and Assessment**

After submitting an application and required documentation, families participate in an in-depth interview and assessment. This step allows family service staff to understand the child's developmental needs, the family's circumstances, and any supports that may be required. Staff are trained in Trauma-Informed Care and Motivational Interviewing to ensure these conversations are handled with sensitivity, respect, and cultural responsiveness.

#### **Program Model and Site Placement**

Following review of eligibility and family needs, families are offered placement in a classroom or home-based setting that aligns with their preferences, transportation access, and program availability. Families receive clear communication about their child's assigned site, start date, teacher, and next steps for onboarding.

#### **Orientation and Community Connection**

Before a child's first day, families attend an orientation session that introduces program expectations, schedules, and services. They meet their child's teacher and family service specialist and, if applicable, receive transportation information. OPK often coordinates orientation activities with access to services such as immunizations, dental exams, WIC appointments, and developmental screenings, streamlining access to care for families. Family service staff maintain strong partnerships with community organizations, including local DHS offices, to ensure coordinated support.

This family-driven enrollment process ensures that OPK services are personalized, equitable, and grounded in the principle that families know what is best for their children.

### **Parent Policy Council: Governance and Empowerment**

The OPK Policy Council is a cornerstone of the program's commitment to shared governance, family empowerment, and accountability. Composed primarily of parents of currently enrolled children, along with community representatives, the Council provides direct oversight and decision-making authority on critical aspects of the program.

#### **Governance Responsibilities**

The Policy Council plays a formal role in approving key operational and strategic decisions, including:

- Program budgets
- Grant applications and renewals
- Hiring of leadership staff
- Program goals, design, and policies affecting services to children and families

Each OPK grantee is required to maintain an active Policy Council and submit documentation—such as minutes reflecting discussions and approvals—as a condition of receiving OPK funding. This governance

structure ensures transparency and family representation at every level of program decision-making.

## Parent Leadership Development

Beyond governance, the Policy Council serves as a vital platform for parent leadership and civic engagement. Members gain skills in:

- Parliamentary procedure and collaborative decision-making
- Understanding and shaping early childhood policies
- Advocating for services and resources at the local and state level

OPK actively supports parent leaders in participating in advocacy efforts, including legislative visits and testimony. Through collaboration with organizations like the Oregon Head Start Association, parents receive training and mentorship in how to advocate effectively for policies that support children and families.

## Impact and Community Empowerment

Participation in the Policy Council empowers parents to build confidence, strengthen their leadership skills, and increase their engagement in both the program and their broader communities. Many parent leaders go on to serve on school boards, participate in community-based organizations, or become peer advocates supporting other families.

This model of governance not only strengthens OPK programs but creates long-term ripple effects—building civic leadership and advancing family-centered policies that improve outcomes for children across Oregon.

## Parent Leadership and Legislative Engagement

OPK and Head Start programs recognize that parents are among the most effective advocates for their children. A core component of the OPK model is the intentional development of parent leadership skills, including training on civic engagement and advocacy. Through structured opportunities and targeted support, OPK equips families with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to influence public policy and promote investments in early childhood programs.

## Building Advocacy Capacity

OPK grantees offer training and mentorship to help parents understand how the legislative process works and how they can use their voices to inform and shape public policy. Key areas of learning include:

- **Understanding Government and Legislative Processes:** Parents are introduced to the structure and function of government at local, state, and federal levels. Workshops and informational sessions cover how bills are introduced, how legislative committees operate, and how decisions are made on funding and policy priorities.
- **Developing Effective Advocacy Skills:** Parents learn practical communication strategies for engaging with lawmakers, including:
  - Writing compelling letters or emails
  - Making advocacy-focused phone calls
  - Providing testimony during legislative hearings
  - Organizing and participating in in-person meetings with elected officials

These skills prepare parents to share their lived experiences in ways that resonate with policymakers and illustrate the tangible impact of early learning investments.

## Relationship Building and Collective Action

OPK encourages and facilitates sustained engagement between parents and elected officials. This includes support for:

- **Direct legislative meetings** at the Capitol or in local districts
- **Participation in town halls and public forums**
- **Statewide advocacy days**, often in partnership with the Oregon Head Start Association, where families, staff, and advocates collectively lobby for increased early childhood funding and services

Parents are not only informed advocates but also visible, credible messengers whose voices reflect the realities of families experiencing poverty, housing instability, or other barriers. Their presence and testimony humanize policy decisions and help legislators understand the stakes of their actions.

## Lasting Civic Engagement and Community Leadership

Beyond short-term advocacy efforts, OPK aims to foster long-term civic engagement. Many parents who begin their leadership journey through OPK Policy Councils or legislative training go on to:

- Join local school boards or advisory committees
- Engage in community organizing and peer support
- Continue advocating for systems change in education, healthcare, and social services

The leadership skills developed through OPK have enduring effects. Parents gain a sense of agency, broaden their civic participation, and become ambassadors for early childhood equity in their communities.

## Policy Relevance and Impact

The investment in parent leadership is not peripheral—it is central to OPK's success and accountability. Engaged families strengthen program quality, reinforce local governance, and advocate for public resources that align with the real needs of Oregon families. By embedding parent voice in both program operations and statewide policy conversations, OPK ensures that those most impacted by early learning services are at the table—and shaping the future.

## Comprehensive Services: Supporting Children and Strengthening Families

The OPK program delivers comprehensive services that support not only the developmental needs of children but also the stability and well-being of their families. Grounded in the Head Start model, OPK recognizes that a child's long-term success is closely linked to the health, safety, and resilience of their caregivers. Through integrated, family-centered supports, OPK addresses barriers that often limit opportunity, particularly for families experiencing poverty, housing instability, or other systemic challenges.

### Core Elements of OPK Comprehensive Services

#### 1. Health and Developmental Services

Ensuring children are healthy and developmentally on track is foundational to school readiness. OPK grantees provide:

- Comprehensive health screenings for physical development, vision, hearing, dental, and nutrition



- Connections to primary and preventive care, including help accessing health insurance (e.g., Medicaid)
- Referrals and follow-up for needed medical, dental, or developmental interventions
- Health education for families on topics such as nutrition, hygiene, and immunization

## **2. Mental Health and Social-Emotional Support**

To foster emotional resilience and behavioral health, OPK offers:

- Screening and early identification of mental health or developmental concerns
- Individual or family counseling referrals as needed
- Social-emotional learning opportunities embedded in the classroom
- Trauma-informed staff training and parenting support to promote strong, nurturing relationships

## **3. Family Partnership and Goal Setting**

Each family collaborates with a Family Services Specialist to set individualized goals through a Family Partnership Agreement, which may include:

- Housing stability and safety
- Employment, education, or financial goals
- Access to child care, legal aid, or other social services
- Family wellness and parenting supports

These goals are revisited throughout the year, helping families measure progress and access additional resources as needs evolve.

## **4. Parent Education and Leadership**

Parent involvement is a hallmark of OPK, both in classroom settings and in program governance. Supports include:

- Parenting workshops on child development, household routines, and behavior management
- Family engagement activities and home learning resources
- Opportunities to serve on Policy Councils, where parents influence key program decisions
- Leadership development that prepares parents to advocate for their children and communities

## **5. Early Learning and School Readiness**

OPK provides high-quality early childhood education designed to close achievement gaps and ensure school readiness:

- Research-based instruction focused on cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical development
- Inclusive, culturally responsive classrooms that honor family traditions and languages
- Transition planning to ensure smooth entry into kindergarten, including collaboration with local school districts

## 6. Nutrition and Food Security

Recognizing the critical link between nutrition and learning, OPK supports:

- Daily meals and snacks that meet USDA nutrition guidelines
- Nutrition education and healthy cooking classes for parents
- Referrals to food access programs, including WIC, SNAP, and local food banks

## 7. Housing, Stability, and Economic Mobility

Safe, stable housing is essential to family well-being. OPK partners with families to:

- Address urgent housing needs, including homelessness or overcrowding
- Connect with emergency shelters, transitional housing, and rental support programs
- Build financial literacy and budgeting skills
- Assist with employment readiness and access to job training or placement, including through OPK providers themselves

## 8. Community Referrals and Navigation Support

As a trusted point of access, OPK programs help families navigate public and community systems, offering referrals to:

- Child care subsidies and transportation services
- Mental health and substance use treatment providers
- Legal assistance, domestic violence support, and other specialized services
- Public benefit programs such as TANF, housing assistance, and unemployment insurance

## Policy Significance

OPK's comprehensive, two-generation approach is a nationally recognized model for promoting equity, improving school outcomes, and increasing family self-sufficiency. By addressing root causes of educational and economic disparities, these services reduce downstream costs in health, social services, and remedial education. OPK represents a strategic investment in Oregon's children and families—producing measurable returns in school readiness, workforce participation, and community stability.

## OPK Home Visiting Services: Strengthening Family Engagement and Child Development

Home visiting is a cornerstone of the OPK program, offering families essential support and resources tailored to their individual needs. These services are designed to help parents actively engage in their child's development and learning within the home environment. By providing regular, personalized visits from educators and family advocates, OPK fosters a deeper connection between families and the program, ensuring that both children and their parents receive the comprehensive support necessary for success in school and life.

### Types of Home Visiting Services

#### 1. Education Home Visits

Education home visits are conducted by the child's classroom teacher. These visits allow educators to

gain valuable insights into the child's home environment, behaviors, and interests, which can help inform classroom instruction. Additionally, teachers provide updates on the child's progress and share strategies to support continued development at home. This two-way communication ensures a consistent and holistic approach to the child's learning, bridging the gap between the classroom and the home.

## **2. Family Service Home Visits**

Family service home visits are conducted by Family Advocates or Family Service Associates, with a focus on supporting parents and caregivers in areas such as parenting, mental health, financial stability, and employment readiness. Home visitors help families set and work toward personal goals, offering guidance on issues such as housing, education, and job preparation. These visits promote overall family stability, which is critical to the child's success and well-being.

## **3. Home-Based Model**

The Home-Based Model combines the elements of both Education and Family Service Home Visits. In this model, the classroom teacher also serves as the family advocate, providing both educational insights and family support during home visits. This integrated approach allows for a seamless connection between the child's learning and family goals, creating a comprehensive support system for the child and their family.

## **Key Components of Home Visiting Services**

### **Personalized Family Support**

Each home visit is tailored to meet the unique needs of the family. The home visitor, whether an early childhood educator or family advocate, works directly with parents to set goals, identify challenges, and offer guidance on child development. This approach ensures that every family receives the support they need to succeed both educationally and personally.

### **Promoting Early Learning**

Home visitors help parents understand the importance of early childhood education and provide practical strategies to foster their child's development outside of the classroom. This may include recommendations for daily activities, such as reading together, engaging in interactive play, or helping children develop early language skills. By empowering parents to be active participants in their child's learning, home visiting enhances the child's educational experience both at home and in the classroom.

### **Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships**

Building a positive parent-child relationship is central to the success of home visiting. Visitors offer guidance on positive parenting practices, helping parents establish routines, manage behavior, and promote healthy emotional development. These visits provide a space for parents to reflect on their relationship with their child, receive tailored advice, and improve their caregiving practices.

### **Connecting Families to Community Resources**

In addition to supporting the child's development, home visitors help families access community resources and services. This can include referrals to healthcare providers, food assistance, housing resources, job training, or educational opportunities. Home visitors ensure that families are aware of the full range of support available to them, helping them navigate complex systems to access essential services.

## Building Strong Family-Program Partnerships

Home visiting strengthens the partnership between families and the OPK program. By visiting families in their own homes, OPK staff can gain a deeper understanding of the child's environment, and the unique challenges families may face. This open communication fosters trust and allows for more effective planning to ensure the child's educational and developmental needs are met.

## Culturally Responsive and Family-Centered Approach

OPK's home visiting services are designed to be culturally responsive and family-centered, recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds, values, and beliefs of each family. Home visitors ensure that services are relevant and meaningful to the families they serve, fostering trust and empowering parents to engage fully in their child's education and development.

## Benefits of Home Visiting Services

- **Increased Parent Engagement:** Regular home visits equip parents with the tools and confidence needed to be more involved in their child's learning, resulting in stronger engagement with the OPK program.
- **Improved Child Outcomes:** By supporting both the child's development and the family's well-being, home visiting creates a nurturing environment that promotes positive child outcomes, including better school readiness.
- **Stronger Family Support Systems:** Home visiting helps families build a network of support, connecting them to resources that foster long-term stability and success.

Home visiting services in OPK are a vital component of the program's holistic approach to child development and family support. By offering personalized assistance, promoting early learning, and connecting families with critical resources, OPK ensures that both children and their families are well-equipped to thrive. Every child enrolled in OPK receives home visits from both their teacher and a family advocate, which strengthens the relationship between families and the program, ensures consistent support, and helps build long-term success for both children and their families.

OPK's home visiting services represent a proven strategy for improving outcomes in early childhood education, family stability, and community well-being. These services not only enhance the educational experience for children but also contribute to broader efforts to address social inequities and support Oregon's most vulnerable families.

## Program Effectiveness and Outcomes: Child and Family Data-Driven Success

The OPK program places a strong emphasis on using child and family outcomes data to guide decision-making, monitor progress, and enhance the overall effectiveness of the program. This data-driven approach ensures that OPK remains responsive to the developmental needs of children, supports families in achieving stability, and works toward the ultimate goal of preparing children for a successful transition to kindergarten.

## Child Assessments: Tracking Progress and Tailoring Support

OPK employs reliable, valid, and developmentally appropriate assessments to track children's progress in key areas of development. These assessments serve multiple purposes, including identifying developmental milestones, pinpointing areas that require additional support, and guiding individualized instructional plans. Key features of OPK's child assessments include:

- **Cultural and Linguistic Appropriateness:** Assessments are designed to be culturally and linguistically relevant, ensuring that they fairly and accurately reflect the development of diverse populations. OPK programs prioritize hiring staff who share the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families they serve, promoting inclusivity and ensuring equitable assessment practices.
- **Comprehensive Developmental Domains:** OPK's assessments cover a broad range of developmental areas, including cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development. This comprehensive approach helps ensure that all aspects of a child's development are considered and supported.
- **Ongoing Observations:** Educators regularly observe children's development and progress, with data collected three to four times per year. These ongoing assessments allow teachers to make data-driven decisions, adjust instructional practices in real-time, and identify when additional interventions or referrals to special education services may be necessary.
- **Individualization of Learning Experiences:** Teachers use assessment data to tailor learning experiences that address each child's unique strengths and needs. Individualized goals are set for every child to ensure that instructional practices are aligned with developmental milestones.
- **Family Engagement Insights:** Many assessments incorporate family involvement, helping OPK understand how family circumstances, resources, and engagement impact a child's development. Families are always actively involved in setting and reviewing their child's goals, fostering a collaborative approach to education.

These assessments not only track developmental progress but also serve as a vital tool in shaping teaching strategies and ensuring children are on track for kindergarten readiness.

## Child Outcomes Data: Tailoring Strategies for Success

OPK collects extensive data on children's cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development through observations, assessments, and screenings. This data allows staff to:

- **Track Developmental Progress:** Educators can identify where each child is in their developmental journey and determine whether they are meeting kindergarten readiness expectations.
- **Develop Targeted Interventions:** When data reveals specific challenges (e.g., difficulty with language skills), educators can implement targeted interventions to address areas of concern and promote the child's growth in that domain.

This data-driven approach ensures that every child receives the support they need to thrive and enter kindergarten ready to succeed.



## Family Outcomes Data: Strengthening Support Systems

Family engagement is central to OPK's approach, and the program collects data on family involvement and the unique needs of each family. Data is gathered through various channels, including:

- **Family Surveys and Home Visits:** Regular surveys and home visits allow OPK to gather feedback from families on their needs and experiences with the program.
- **Family Partnership Agreements:** These agreements are used to outline family goals and provide individualized support, such as access to parenting education, health services, or employment assistance.
- **Parent Policy Council Input:** Families have the opportunity to influence program decisions through active participation in the Policy Council, helping ensure the program is responsive to their needs.

This family outcomes data informs program planning and helps OPK design services that address family needs and contribute to children's development and school readiness.

## Informing Kindergarten Readiness and Program Goals

OPK uses both child and family outcomes data to assess progress toward kindergarten readiness goals. This data-driven approach allows the program to:

- **Adjust Curriculum and Teaching Strategies:** If trends in developmental gaps are identified across a group of children, OPK can modify its curriculum or teaching methods to address those specific needs. For example, if a group of children shows delays in language skills, the program may implement targeted literacy interventions.
- **Increase Access to Resources:** Family outcomes data can reveal common barriers to success, such as limited access to educational resources at home. In response, OPK may develop initiatives to increase family access to literacy materials, culturally relevant books, and parent education programs.
- **Continuous Program Improvement:** OPK uses outcomes data not only to track progress but also to improve the overall effectiveness of its services. This data helps program administrators evaluate the success of different initiatives, modify curricula, and provide professional development opportunities for staff.

## Data-Driven Success for Children and Families

Child and family outcomes data play a critical role in ensuring that OPK programs remain effective in meeting the needs of both children and their families. By continually assessing developmental progress and family needs, OPK is able to adjust its approach, provide individualized support, and ensure that children are ready for kindergarten while families receive the tools and resources they need to thrive.

Through this ongoing process of data collection, analysis, and program refinement, OPK fosters an environment of continuous improvement. The program's data-driven approach not only enhances the quality of early childhood education but also strengthens family stability, contributing to the long-term success of both children and families across Oregon.

## Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is a vital tool used by the OPK programs to support continuous quality improvement. CLASS assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions, which are foundational to creating positive learning environments and promoting child development. By focusing on key domains such as Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support, CLASS provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of teaching practices.

### CLASS Overview:

The CLASS tool is an evidence-based, observational instrument that is employed by the Office of Head Start in the monitoring process of its grant recipients, including OPK's preschool programs. CLASS evaluates the quality of teacher-child interactions within the classroom, assessing three primary domains that impact learning and development:

- **Emotional Support:** This domain focuses on how teachers provide warmth, sensitivity, and support for children's emotional and social well-being.
- **Classroom Organization:** This category assesses how well the classroom environment is structured, including classroom routines, behavior management, and the overall classroom climate.
- **Instructional Support:** This domain evaluates the quality of teaching and learning interactions, including the support provided to children in their cognitive development.

Within each of these domains, CLASS includes specific dimensions that capture more granular details about teacher practices, providing a comprehensive picture of classroom interactions.

### Integration of CLASS into OPK Programs:

OPK grantees integrate CLASS in several key areas:

#### 1. Quality Improvement Cycles

OPK programs use CLASS assessments to identify strengths and areas for growth within classrooms. By observing and measuring the effectiveness of teaching practices, CLASS helps inform data-driven decisions that lead to targeted improvements in instructional strategies, classroom materials, and the overall classroom environment. This ongoing feedback loop supports continuous program enhancement and ensures that teaching practices align with the best standards for early childhood education.

#### 2. Coaching and Professional Development

CLASS data serves as a foundation for individualized coaching and professional development for teachers. Trained coaches observe classroom interactions and provide targeted feedback based on CLASS scores. This coaching process helps educators refine their interactions with children, improve their teaching techniques, and foster a more supportive and engaging classroom atmosphere. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that teachers have the skills and knowledge to align their practices with evidence-based best practices in early childhood education.

#### 3. Enhancing Teaching and Learning

CLASS emphasizes the importance of high-quality interactions in supporting children's development. By assessing teacher-child interactions, OPK uses CLASS to enhance the overall effectiveness of teaching.

Educators are encouraged to build positive relationships, provide meaningful feedback, and maintain a well-organized classroom that supports active, hands-on learning. CLASS ensures that teachers focus on nurturing children's cognitive, social, and emotional development through consistent and purposeful interactions.

In summary, OPK utilizes CLASS as a cornerstone of its ongoing efforts to improve teaching quality, support professional growth, and create optimal learning environments for young children. The systematic assessments, targeted coaching, and reflective supervision processes ensure that educators are equipped with the tools and resources necessary to provide high-quality early childhood education.

## **Monitoring and Partnership with Region X and the Office of Head Start**

OPK programs undergo a rigorous monitoring process to ensure compliance with federal and state standards, and to assess the quality of services provided to children and families. This process is integral to maintaining high standards and continuous improvement.

### **Federal and State Oversight**

OPK programs are monitored through a combination of federal and state oversight, self-assessment, and external reviews. Twenty-five of the thirty OPK grantees receive dual funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the federal Head Start and Early Head Start (HS/EHS) programs. These programs are also subject to oversight by Region X of the Office of Head Start, in collaboration with the Oregon Early Learning Division and the Oregon Head Start Collaboration Office.

This partnership ensures that OPK programs meet the performance standards set by HHS and comply with applicable regulations, ultimately guaranteeing high-quality services for children and families. The alignment of state and federal funding, requirements, and oversight fosters a streamlined system for administering services and ensures that programs are effective in achieving their educational and developmental goals.

### **Program Quality and Effectiveness: Monitoring and Review Process**

The establishment of the state-funded OPK program with comparable requirements and eligibility to federal Head Start has created an innovative and collaborative partnership between federal and state entities. This alignment of standards, funding levels, and reporting requirements ensures that children enrolled in both state and federal Head Start programs receive comprehensive, high-quality services.

This collaborative approach moves Oregon toward the mutual goal of full funding for OPK programs through both state and federal resources, ensuring that all eligible children and families have the opportunity to participate in high-quality early childhood education programs.

### **Monitoring Procedures**

All OPK programs are monitored to assess compliance with both federal and state regulations, ensuring that the programs meet the necessary quality standards. Specifically, the 25 dually funded OPK programs benefit from an efficient administrative system that combines federal and state oversight. By coordinating monitoring efforts through a single administrative structure, OPK programs reduce administrative duplication while enhancing the effectiveness of their services.

In addition, OPK's partnership with the Office of Head Start and Region X ensures that monitoring is aligned

with national standards, allowing OPK programs to maintain high standards of quality while promoting continuous improvement. This collaboration ensures that the programs are responsive to the needs of children and families and that they are effectively preparing children for kindergarten.

The partnership between OPK programs, Region X of the Office of Head Start, and the Early Learning Division at ODE (and at DELC since July 1, 2023) is crucial for maintaining program quality, supporting continuous improvement, and ensuring that children and families receive the comprehensive services they need to thrive. The dual funding and coordinated oversight model help ensure that OPK programs remain aligned with both state and federal objectives, fostering an integrated approach to early childhood education.

## **Federal Monitoring by the Office of Head Start (OHS) for Dually Funded OPK**

### **On-Site Reviews**

The Office of Head Start (OHS) conducts regular on-site reviews of OPK programs to ensure compliance with federal regulations, performance standards, and overall program effectiveness. These reviews involve interviews with staff, direct observations of classroom activities, and a thorough analysis of program records.

### **Biennial Reviews**

OPK programs are typically monitored through biennial in-depth assessments. These reviews evaluate a wide range of areas, including child health and safety, classroom quality, teacher-child interactions, curriculum implementation, family engagement, and governance.

### **Desk Audits**

In addition to on-site reviews, OHS may perform desk audits, which assess program performance based on submitted documentation such as financial reports, policy compliance, and other program data.

## **State and Local Oversight**

### **Oregon Department of Education Early Learning Division (prior to July 1, 2023) | Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care (since July 1, 2023):**

OPK programs are also monitored by state agencies to ensure compliance with both federal and state regulations. The Early Learning Division at ODE conducted reviews on funding, curriculum, local health and safety standards, and program budgets.

ELD monitored all OPK programs, including those that were dually funded, through monthly and quarterly progress reports, annual reports, and submissions of several annual program outcomes. OPK programs are also required to submit a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) workplan that outlines how they meet the diverse needs of the families they serve.

### **Oregon Licensing**

Most OPK sites were licensed through the Early Learning Division at ODE and must adhere to the health and safety guidelines set by Oregon Child Care Licensing.

### **Policy Council and Board Oversight**

Local governing bodies, such as the Policy Council and Board of Directors, hold additional oversight responsibilities to ensure OPK programs meet required standards. These groups review program data and outcomes, make program suggestions, and ensure the program is operating within budget and in compliance with both Head Start Performance Standards (HSPPS) and state licensing requirements.

## Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement

### Self-Assessment

Each OPK program is required to conduct an annual self-assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of its services and identify areas for improvement. This process involves input from staff, parents, and community members to ensure broad stakeholder feedback. Self-assessment reports were submitted annually to Early Learning Division.

### Continuous Improvement

The results from the self-assessment are used to create quality improvement plans that ensure compliance with performance standards, state licensing, and DEI workplans. Programs are expected to adjust and implement improvements based on assessment findings, and they receive data from the Community Needs Assessment, which is also submitted annually.

## Program Data and Performance Monitoring

### Head Start Performance Standards

OPK programs are monitored for compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards. These standards cover areas such as child development, family engagement, staffing qualifications, and fiscal management. Regular reporting ensures that programs are consistently meeting these benchmarks.

### Salary Requirements by the Oregon Early Learning Council (ELC)

All OPK programs are required to pay teaching staff and classroom assistants in accordance with the salary guidelines established by the Oregon Early Learning Council (ELC) in 2020. The table below is subject to change pending revisions by the ELC.

LEAD TEACHER	TARGET SALARY		MINIMUM SALARY	
QUALIFICATION LEVEL	10 MO. SALARY	HOURLY	ANNUAL	HOURLY
Bachelor's Degree (BA) / Registry Step 10	\$63,000	\$36	\$44,000	\$25
Associate Degree (AA) / Registry Step 9	\$54,000	\$31	\$38,000	\$22
Child Development Associates (CDA) Credential / Registry Step 8	\$41,000	\$24	\$32,000	\$18
TEACHER ASSISTANT	TARGET SALARY		MINIMUM SALARY	
QUALIFICATION LEVEL	10 MO. SALARY	HOURLY	ANNUAL	HOURLY
Child Development Associates (CDA) Credential / Registry Step 7 or above	\$38,000	\$22	\$27,000	\$16
Registry Step Less than 7	\$32,000	\$18	\$21,000	\$12 Unless local minimum wage is higher



## Data Collection

Programs must collect and submit data on various service delivery aspects, including enrollment, child outcomes, attendance, and health screenings. This data is essential for performance monitoring, ensuring programs meet the needs of enrolled children. OPK programs submit monthly progress reports by the 15th of each month, along with an End-of-Year Report and a Program Information Report (PIR) summarizing annual program data.

## Corrective Action Plans

If a program is found to be out of compliance during a monitoring review, it is required to submit a Corrective Action Plan (CAP). This plan outlines the steps the program will take to address deficiencies and return to compliance. Support from various entities—including the Office of Head Start, the Oregon Early Learning Division in partnership with The Early Learning Systems Initiative (ELSI) through Oregon State University, OPK Program Managers, Grant Specialists, and 's The Office of Child Care's licensing specialists—are provided to assist with improvement efforts.

## Follow-Up Monitoring

After implementing corrective actions, the program may undergo follow-up monitoring to ensure that improvements are sustained and that the program is in full compliance.

In summary, OPK programs are closely monitored through a multi-layered approach involving federal oversight, state and local reviews, self-assessments, data collection, and corrective action plans. These monitoring efforts are designed to ensure that OPK programs meet required standards and continue to deliver high-quality services to children and families. The ongoing review process promotes continuous improvement, enhancing the effectiveness of these early childhood education programs.





## Expanding Access and Availability of Prenatal to Kindergarten Services

Oregon has consistently prioritized the expansion and enhancement of OPK services to better meet the needs of children, families, and the professionals who implement the program. Strengthening the workforce has been a key strategy to ensure the continued quality and stability of services, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like programs nationwide, OPK faced significant challenges in recovering and maintaining services during the pandemic. However, additional funding to support the recruitment and retention of qualified staff enabled OPK programs to continue serving children and families without sacrificing performance standards or the quality of services provided.

In May 2019, the Student Success Act was signed into law, allocating a historic \$1 billion annually to support education in Oregon. Of this, 20% is designated for Early Learning, which has been instrumental in expanding OPK Prenatal to Three services and creating more full-day OPK classrooms. However, the total number of children served in OPK 3-5 services has decreased due to a lack of available facilities and classroom space to extend the program day. To address this, some programs had to reduce the number of children served in order to lengthen the day, transitioning from half-day to full-day services. As a result, the program duration model now serves families for up to 1,020 hours per year.

### Expansion Timeline

Year	Total State-Funded Slots	Part Day/Part Year	Full Day 1,020 hours	Early Head Start 1,320 hours (full year)	Children Served with Special Education Plans	Notes
2019-20	8,003	7,660	343	64	1,718	The Student Success Act passed, directing funds to support Early Learning and expand OPK Prenatal to Three services.
2020-21	7,731	5,012	2,719	1,136	1,159	Prenatal to Three model breakdown: Home-based: 449, Center-based: 577, FCC: 22, LDO: 88.
2021-22	7,177	2,713	5,004	1,152	1,723	Prenatal to Three model breakdown: Home-based: 449, Center-based: 593, FCC: 22, LDO: 88.
2022-23	7,332	3,598	3,734	1,415	2,001	Prenatal to Three model breakdown: Home-based: 409, Center-based: 812, FCC: 34, LDO: 160.

## Key Milestones in Expansion

- **2019-2020:** The OPK program expanded to increase the availability of Prenatal to Three-year-old services and added more full-day preschool options to meet the 1,020-hour requirement. The cost per slot increased by \$2,600 to support staff salaries in line with the Early Learning Council (ELC) Salary Guidelines.
- **2021-2022:** The slot cost increased by an additional \$2,000 per slot to further support meeting the ELC Salary Guidelines and offset rising program costs.
- **2022-2023:** The Oregon Legislature directed the Early Learning Division to use unspent OPK funds to provide a 7% increase in the cost per slot to support staff wellness, increase wages, and stabilize staffing patterns.

## Addressing Child Care Shortages in Oregon

Oregon is widely recognized as a child care desert, particularly for services aimed at children from prenatal to age three. OPK has consistently expanded into regions across the state to create more opportunities for families to access care for their infants and toddlers. This expansion is crucial in ensuring that families in underserved areas can access quality early learning and support services.

## Community Needs Assessment and Program Adaptation

OPK programs are required to assess family needs and evaluate available community resources to determine the appropriate suite of services for their local areas. The Community Needs Assessment (CNA) is a crucial tool for OPK programs to understand the specific needs of the communities they serve. It informs program planning, resource allocation, and continuous improvement efforts, ensuring that services align with the evolving needs of children and families. The CNA gathers data across several key areas, including demographic information, family needs, child development, health and safety, and community resources.

To access additional funding, OPK programs must submit their Community Needs Assessment (CNA). The Head Start Community Needs Assessment Matrix serves as the template for these assessments. By utilizing the CNA, OPK programs can adapt their offerings to meet the specific needs of the communities they serve, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and equitably.

Oregon's ongoing investment in the OPK program has led to significant improvements in access to high-quality early childhood education, particularly for children aged prenatal to three. Through strategic funding, workforce support, and the expansion of full-day classrooms, OPK has made strides in ensuring that more children and families across the state can benefit from these services. Continued focus on workforce stability, community partnerships, and data-driven decision-making will be essential in expanding access and meeting the needs of Oregon's youngest learners.

## Components of the Community Needs Assessment (CNA)

The Community Needs Assessment (CNA) is a crucial tool for OPK programs to understand the specific needs of the communities they serve. It informs program planning, resource allocation, and continuous improvement efforts, ensuring that services align with the evolving needs of children and families. The CNA gathers data across several key areas, including demographic information, family needs, child development, health and safety, and community resources.

### 1. Demographic Data

OPK programs collect data on the population they serve, such as the number of children under age 5, family structures, income levels, and racial and ethnic composition. This demographic data helps programs identify the specific needs of various community groups, ensuring that services are tailored to the diverse population.

### 2. Family Needs

A core component of the CNA is understanding the needs of families. This includes examining factors such as:

- Access to housing, transportation, and healthcare
- Employment support and family literacy
- Parenting support and mental health needs

By identifying these challenges, OPK programs can design services that address the most pressing issues families face, ultimately supporting family stability and well-being.

### 3. Child Development and Education Needs

The CNA evaluates the developmental needs of children, including gaps in early childhood education, health services, and social-emotional development. Programs assess whether children have access to quality early learning opportunities and where additional support may be necessary to ensure their growth and development.

### 4. Health and Safety Needs

The assessment also looks at the overall health status of children and families in the community, including:

- Access to healthcare, immunizations, and dental care
- Mental health services and food security
- Environmental conditions affecting children's health and well-being

Identifying these needs ensures that OPK programs can provide comprehensive support to promote healthy development.

### 5. Community Resources and Partnerships

The CNA identifies local resources and services that could help meet the needs of children and families, such as schools, healthcare providers, and social services. By understanding the community's resources, OPK programs can form partnerships that enhance service delivery and strengthen the support network for families.

## How Head Start Programs Use the Community Needs Assessment

The data collected through the CNA guides several critical functions of OPK programs, from service delivery to ongoing program improvements.

### 1. Program Planning and Service Delivery

The CNA helps programs design services that are directly aligned with the needs of children and families in their communities. For example, if the CNA reveals that many families lack reliable transportation, the program might prioritize offering transportation services to ensure families can access OPK services.

### 2. Targeting Resources

By identifying the areas of greatest need, OPK programs can allocate resources more efficiently. For instance, if there is a shortage of healthcare services for children, the program might focus on expanding health screenings or partner with local healthcare providers to offer medical services. All OPK programs are required to establish a Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) to collaborate on planning health services for at-risk families in their regions.

### 3. Identifying Gaps in Services

The CNA highlights service gaps, particularly for populations with specific needs, such as children with disabilities or families experiencing homelessness. By identifying these gaps, programs can work toward closing them, ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to the resources and services they need. The CNA also examines broader community challenges with substance misuse, and mental health needs.

### 4. Continuous Improvement

The CNA is not a one-time process; it is conducted periodically to track community changes and evolving needs. The assessment provides ongoing data that informs continuous improvement, enabling OPK programs to adapt their strategies to meet the dynamic needs of families and children.

### 5. Engaging Families and the Community

The CNA involves input from families, community members, and local organizations to ensure that the needs assessment reflects the real concerns and priorities of those most affected. This engagement fosters community buy-in and helps build strong partnerships with local partners, which in turn strengthens the overall service delivery. Families' perspectives are collected through surveys, focus groups, and interviews, and the Policy Council plays a key role in helping determine priority populations for services.

### 6. Guiding Family and Child Services

By understanding family-specific challenges, such as financial stress, educational needs, or food insecurity, OPK can offer targeted services like:

- Family literacy programs
- Job readiness workshops
- Referrals to local food and housing assistance programs

OPK programs also often collaborate with local government and philanthropic organizations, using bond or local tax dollars to provide emergency support, such as hotel stays for families facing homelessness or transportation to urgent medical appointments.

Compliance and Reporting

The CNA is a federal requirement for OPK programs to ensure compliance with Head Start and State licensing regulations. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandates that OPK programs conduct a comprehensive needs assessment every three years as part of their quality improvement efforts. The findings from the CNA inform the program’s annual updates, which are used for reporting and to demonstrate how the program is addressing the needs of the community. Additionally, OPK programs were required to submit the most recent CNA when requesting additional funding from the Early Learning Division at ODE.

Focus on Families Experiencing Homelessness

One of the key areas OPK has focused on is supporting families experiencing homelessness. The following data reflects the number of OPK children and families experiencing homelessness in 2022, combined with federal Head Start and Early Head Start funded slots:

Type of Program	Homeless Families Served	Homeless Children Served	Homeless Families Acquired Housing
OPKP-3/EHS	595	638	123
OPK/HS	1,138	1,186	259

The CNA data enables OPK programs to target services and resources to families in need, with a particular focus on addressing housing instability and other challenges facing homeless families.

Prenatal, Infant, and Toddler Care

In 2019, the Early Learning Account (ELA) was established with the passage of the Student Success Act, allowing for a significant expansion of OPK Prenatal to Three services. The introduction of the Extended Duration Program Model (1,020 hours of center-based care) further strengthened support for prenatal, infant, and toddler care. As a result, the number of OPKP-3 slots grew from 64 in 2019 to 1,415 in 2023, marking substantial progress in meeting the needs of Oregon’s youngest children.

The Community Needs Assessment is an invaluable tool for OPK programs, helping to ensure that services are designed to meet the specific needs of children and families. By regularly collecting and analyzing data, engaging families, and fostering partnerships, OPK programs are able to provide responsive, targeted services that improve outcomes for children and families across Oregon.

## The OPK Workforce

The OPK workforce is composed of a broad spectrum of early care and education professionals, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the program. In addition to educators, the OPK workforce includes family service staff, home visitors, center managers, program directors, bus drivers, disability and mental health professionals, education managers, coaches, and administrative personnel. On average, each OPK program serves approximately 450 families, requiring a larger and more specialized workforce than typical childcare facilities. This diversity of staff is essential to meeting the unique needs of the families served and ensuring the success of the program.

### Staff Diversity and Compensation

The OPK workforce is diverse, and its composition plays a key role in the effectiveness of the program. For the racial and ethnic diversity of staff see Figure 8. Other important staff demographics include:

- Staff who are current or former parents in OPK/HS (1,393 staff were current or former parents in 2021-2022 and 1,372 were current or former parents in 2022-2023, see next section for a description of this approach)
- Staff who speak languages other than English (see Figure 6 on [page 17](#))
- Numbers of staff who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ, women, or female-presenting

### “Grow Your Own” Philosophy in Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten

Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK) embraces a “Grow Your Own” philosophy—a commitment to developing a workforce that reflects the families and communities it serves. Central to this approach is the intentional recruitment, training, and hiring of parents who have participated or are currently participating in the program themselves. Many parents begin their journey with OPK as volunteers, Policy Council members, or classroom aides, and with support from the program, go on to earn credentials and degrees that prepare them for careers in early childhood education, family support, or program administration.

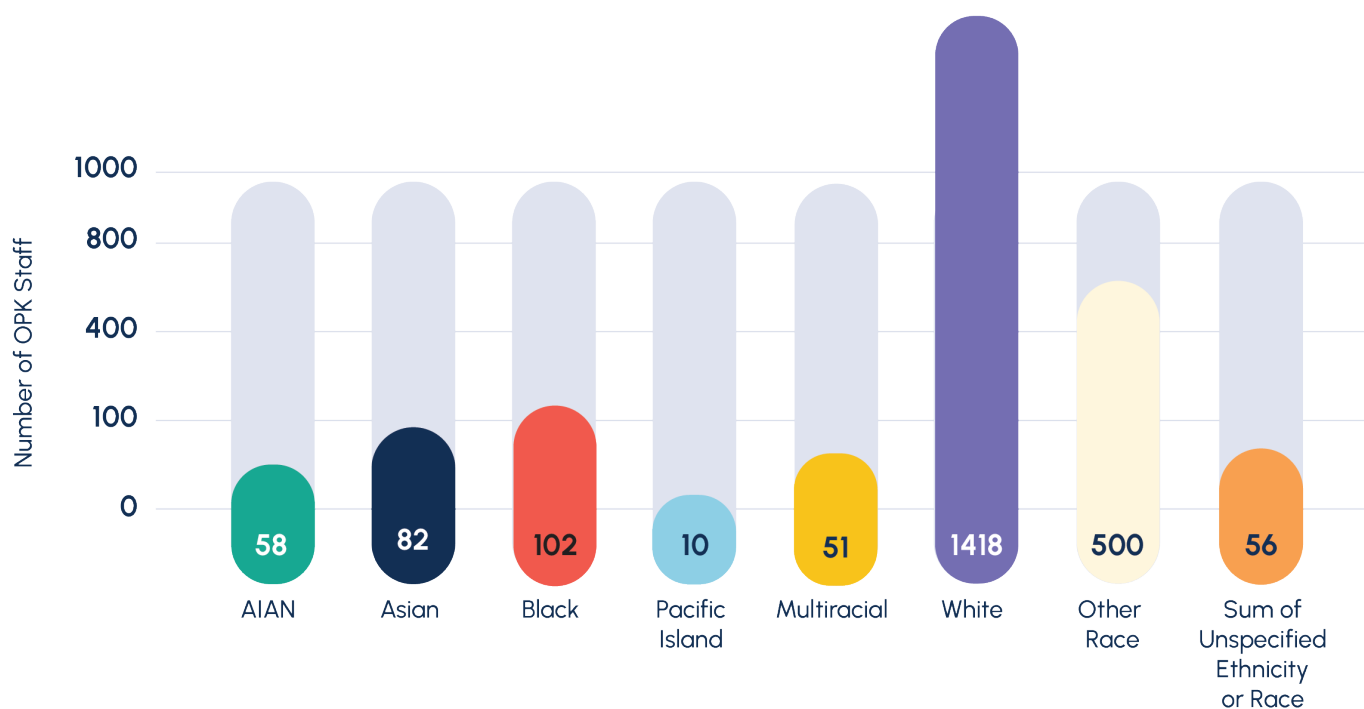
This model not only strengthens the early childhood workforce but also empowers parents by recognizing and building on their lived experience, cultural knowledge, and deep commitment to their communities. OPK programs often provide pathways to employment through paid training opportunities, assistance with educational advancement (such as CDA credentials or associate and bachelor’s degrees), and mentorship from experienced staff. In doing so, OPK breaks down systemic barriers to employment and creates a more culturally and linguistically responsive workforce that fosters long-term impact for children and families.



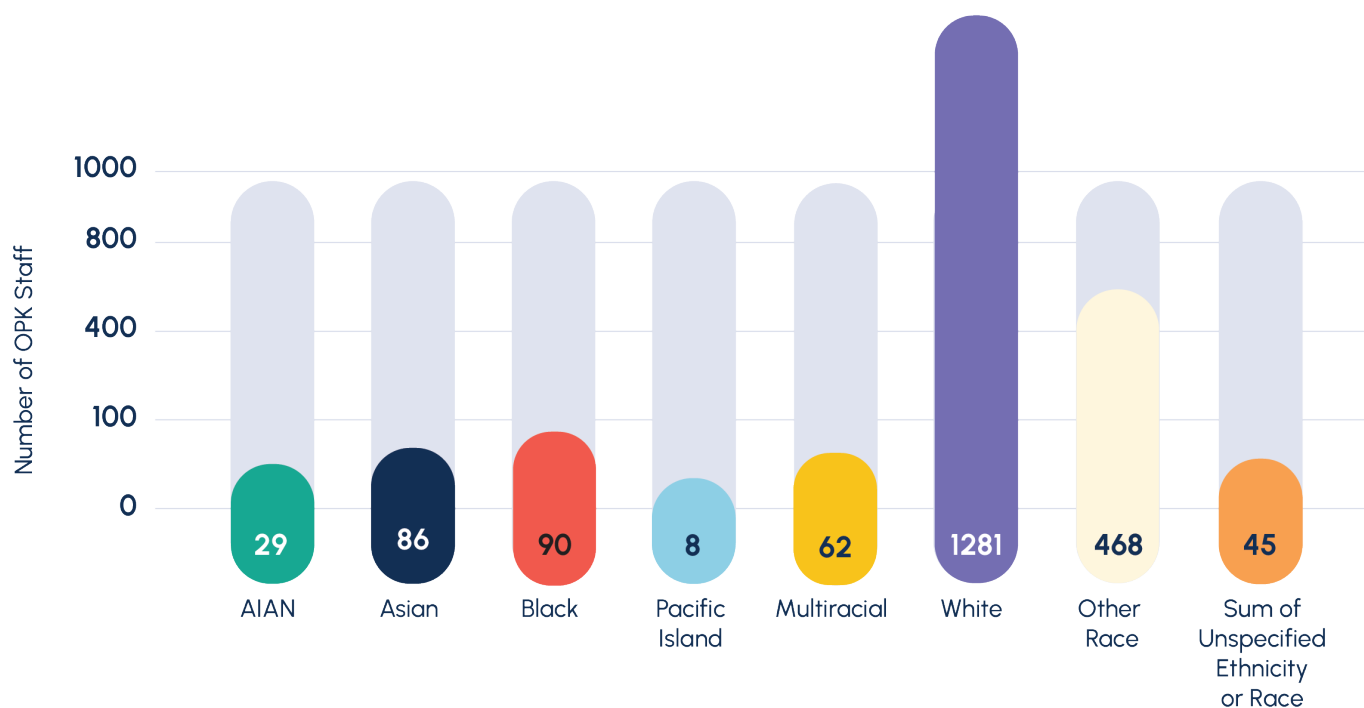


**Figure 8.** Race/Ethnicity of OPK Staff

### Racial Identity of OPK Staff in 2021-2022



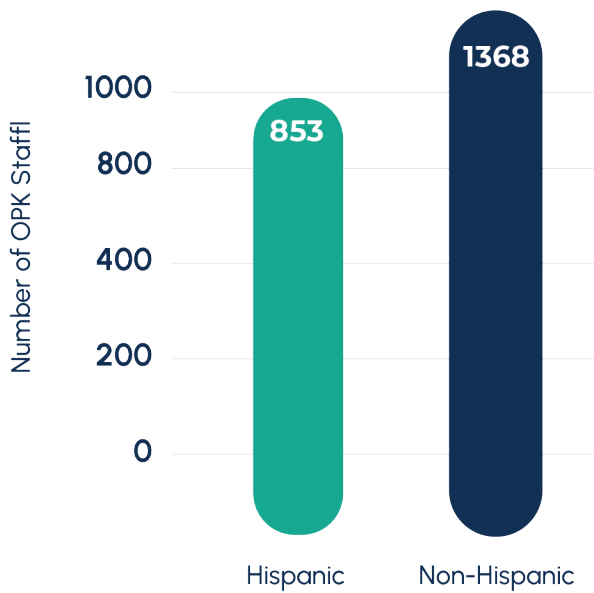
### Racial Identity of OPK Staff in 2022-2023



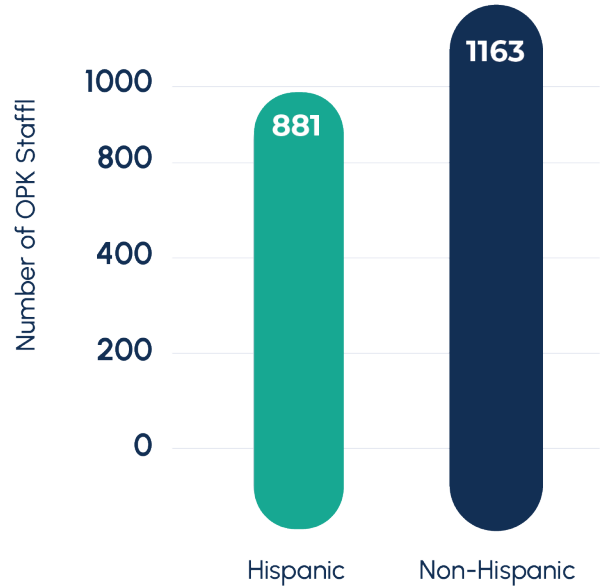
**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

## Ethnic Identity of OPK Staff in 2021-2022



## Ethnic Identity of OPK Staff in 2022-2023



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

Efforts to improve staff compensation are ongoing, as a competitive and equitable salary structure is essential to attract and retain skilled professionals in the early childhood education field.

## Average Teacher Annualized 10-month salary OPK by Program

2021-2022			2022-2023		
Program Type	Assistant Teacher	Lead Teacher	Program Type	Assistant Teacher	Lead Teacher
OPK 3-5/Head Start	\$29,226	\$44,338	OPK 3-5/Head Start	\$32,570	\$47,116
OPK P-3/Early Head Start	\$24,700	\$34,064	OPK P-3/Early Head Start	\$24,760	\$38,280

2021-2022 Staff Turnover Rates						
Total Staff	# Staff left	#Staff replaced	% Staff left who were replaced	Total teaching staff	# Teaching staff replaced	% Teaching staff replaced
7352	1016	634	62%	2107	482	48%
Fourteen percent of staff left the program, of those who left, between 62% and 48 % were replaced over the program year, depending on role.						
2022-2023 Staff Turnover Rates						
Total Staff	# Staff left	#Staff replaced	% Staff left who were replaced	Total teaching staff	# Teaching staff replaced	% Teaching staff replaced
6939	967	484	50%	1922	400	45%
Fourteen percent of staff left the program, of those who left, between 50% and 45% were were replaced over the program year depending on role.						

LEAD TEACHER	TARGET SALARY		MINIMUM SALARY	
QUALIFICATION LEVEL	10 MO. SALARY	HOURLY	ANNUAL	HOURLY
Bachelor's Degree (BA) / Registry Step 10	\$63,000	\$36	\$44,000	\$25
Associate Degree (AA) / Registry Step 9	\$54,000	\$31	\$38,000	\$22
Child Development Associates (CDA) Credential / Registry Step 8	\$41,000	\$24	\$32,000	\$18

TEACHER ASSISTANT	TARGET SALARY		MINIMUM SALARY	
QUALIFICATION LEVEL	10 MO. SALARY	HOURLY	ANNUAL	HOURLY
Child Development Associates (CDA) Credential / Registry Step 7 or above	\$38,000	\$22	\$27,000	\$16
Registry Step Less than 7	\$32,000	\$18	\$21,000	\$12 Unless local minimum wage is higher

## Staff Development

OPK programs spend at least 2.5% of their total budget on training and technical assistance for their staff. They worked directly with the Office of Child Care at the Early Learning Division to ensure staff are in the background check system and they worked with the Oregon Registry Online to verify and track individual staff's educational and training progress. All staff must meet the requirements set by their OPK grant and the Office of Child Care.

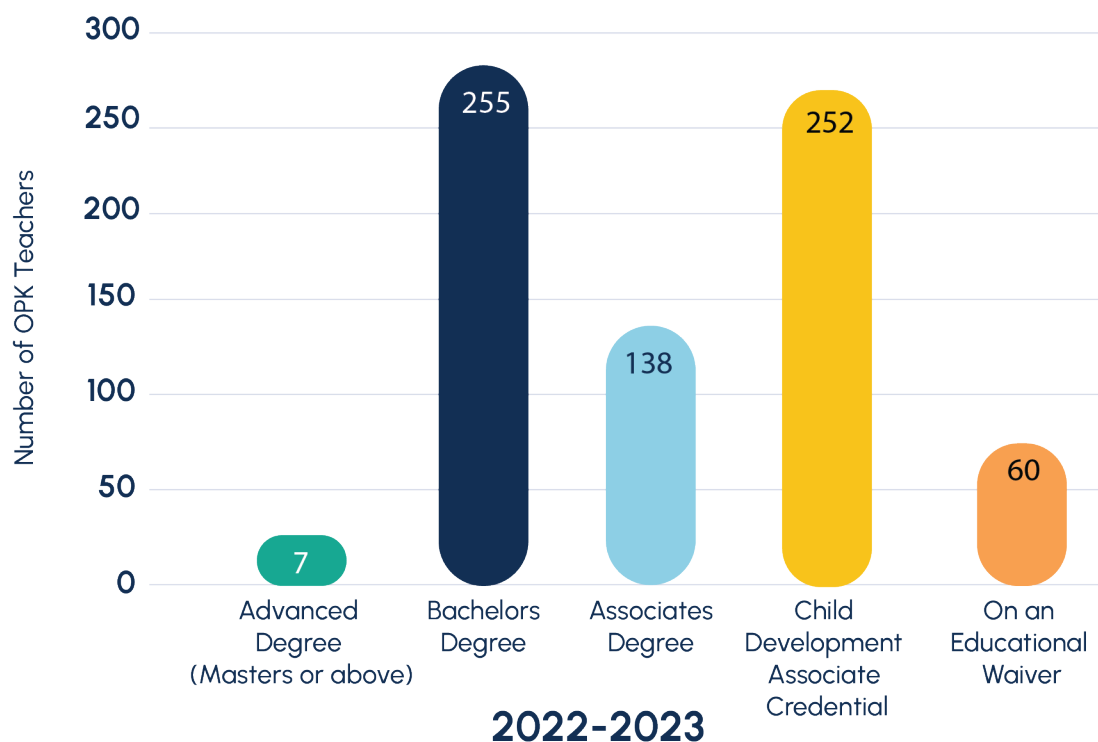
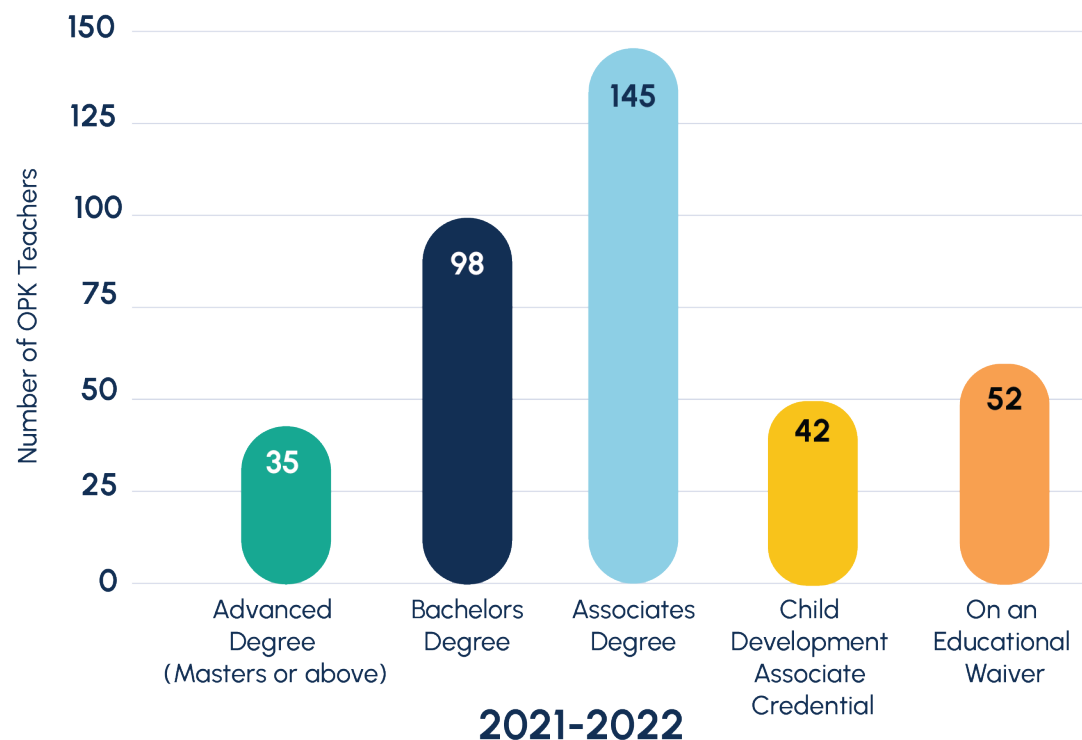
### Educational Requirements for Teachers in Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten

Teachers in OPK programs are held to high educational standards to ensure the delivery of high-quality early childhood education. For preschool classrooms, each lead teacher must have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field with coursework equivalent to a major in early childhood education. This ensures that educators have the foundational knowledge and skills to support school readiness and developmental growth for children ages 3 to 5.

For the infant and toddler age group served through OPK's home-based or center-based services, staff must meet requirements aligned with Early Head Start standards. This includes having a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential specific to infants and toddlers or an equivalent degree or certification. OPK programs also support ongoing professional development and continuing education to ensure that teaching staff stay current with best practices in early childhood education, child development, and family engagement (see Figure 9 and 10 on the next page).



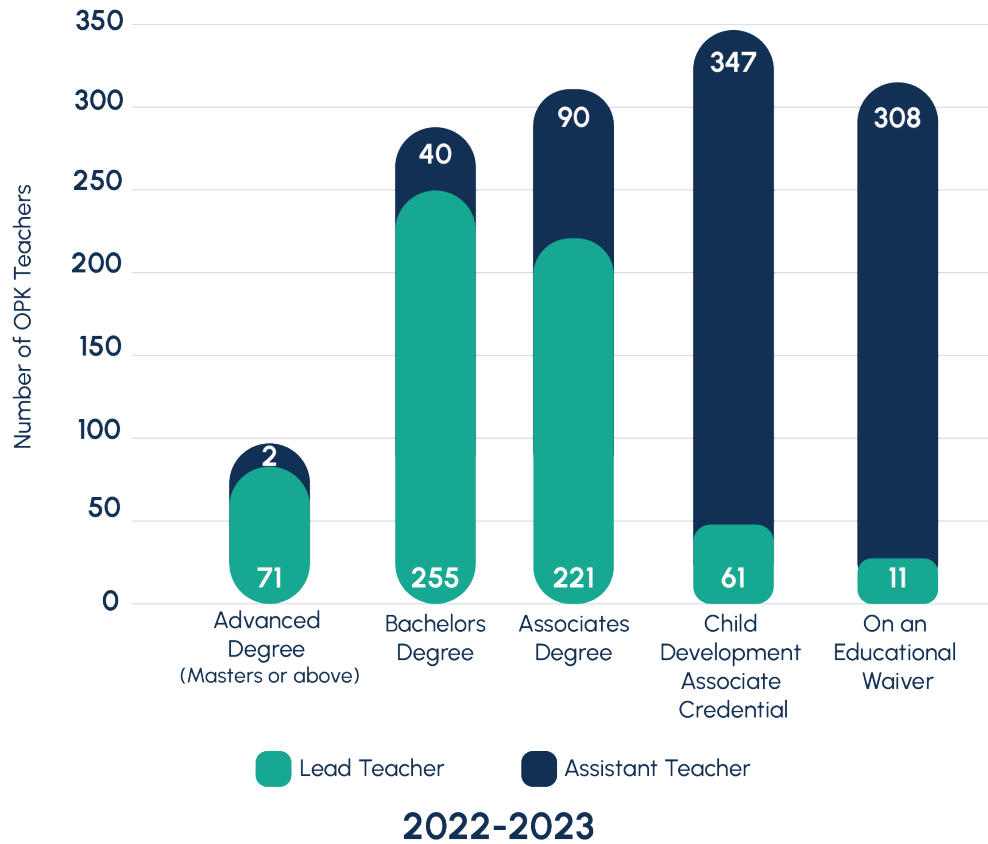
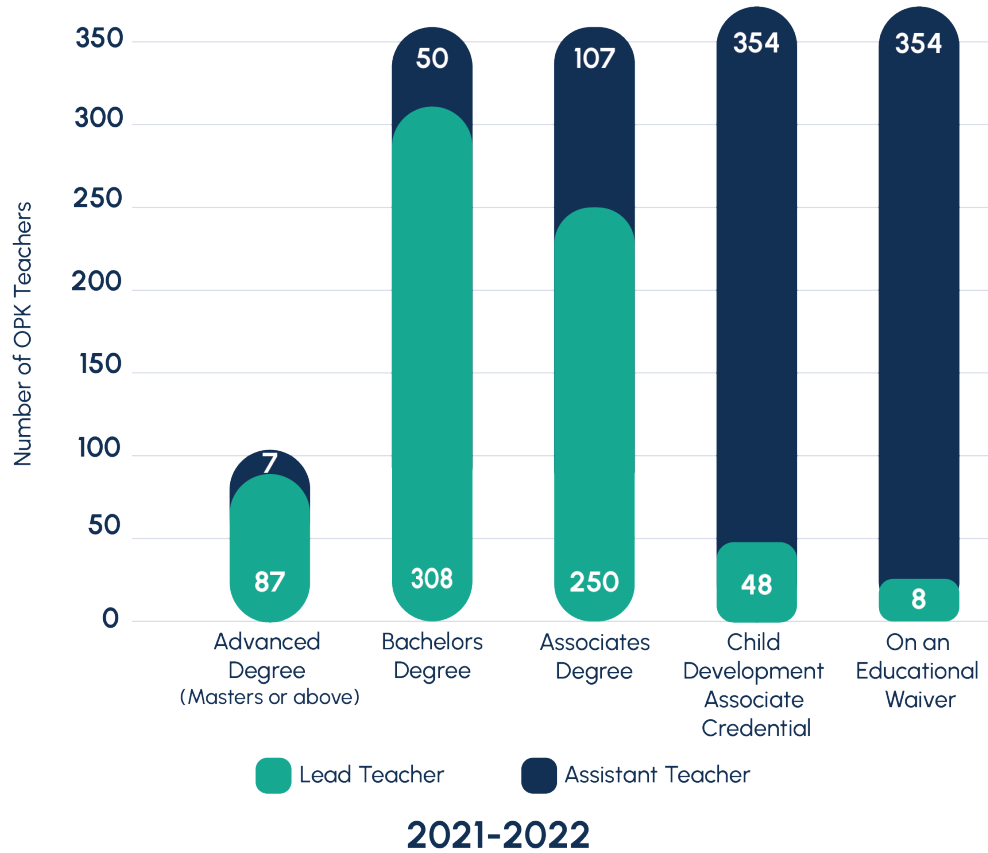
**Figure 9.** Education Level for OPK P-3 Teachers



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

**Figure 10. Education Level for OPK 3-5 Teachers**



**2021-2022 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

**2022-2023 Source:** Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023



## Improvements to State Systems of Support

The Early Learning Systems Initiative (ELSI), established in 2021 through a partnership between Oregon State University (OSU) and the Early Learning Division supports early childhood professionals across the state. ELSI was created to expand access to high-quality professional learning opportunities and provide technical assistance to early learning and care professionals.

ELSI's work is focused in three core areas:

1. Coaching
2. Professional Learning
3. Impact and Evaluation

Now in collaboration with the Department of Early Learning and Care and other partners, ELSI strengthens and expands existing professional development opportunities to meet the diverse needs of Oregon's early learning professionals. The center uses a culturally and linguistically responsive approach, centering on anti-racism, equity, and inclusion in all of its work. It is particularly committed to supporting professionals who serve children from historically marginalized populations.

### Key Support for OPK

ELSI worked closely with the Early Learning Division to support the OPK program, helping strengthen the workforce and enhance service delivery. Below is an overview of the key activities and accomplishments for OPK during the 2021-2023 biennium:

#### 1. Coaching for Early Learning Division Programs

- Established a Mentor Coach role and initiated the recruitment process, with a framework developed for the role.
- Hosted outreach events to engage OPK grantees in mentoring and professional development opportunities.
- In 2023, updated the Mentor Coach Professional Development (PD) to incorporate feedback from the 2022 Preschool Development Grant.
- Provided ongoing Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) training, focusing on collaborative partnerships, goal-setting, action planning, and reflective practices.
- Practice-Based Coaching Suites offered targeted training on:
  - Zeroing in on the coaching cycle through focused observation.
  - Strengthening coaching cycles through reflection and feedback.
- Released the 2023-2024 Oregon Coaching Guidebook, including OPK-specific versions to enhance the quality of coaching and support.

#### 2. Coaching Competencies

- Released the Oregon Coaching Competencies in August 2022, available in English, Spanish, Traditional Chinese, Russian, and Vietnamese.
- Piloted the Oregon Coaching Pathways: Tier 1 course with a select group of coaches from November 2022 to January 2023.

- Collaborated with the Early Learning Division and Cultivate Learning to develop and pilot the Foundation of Coaching online course, which was made publicly available in Fall 2023.

### **3. Training and Support Resources**

- Developed wellbeing resource guides focused on supporting children (ages 0-5), families, and educators with a trauma-informed, anti-racist, and anti-bias lens. These resources were designed to be integrated into professional learning opportunities and will be translated into essential languages for broader access.
- Booklist guides were created to assist educators and families in addressing challenging topics with children (ages 0-8). These guides have been translated into the five essential languages, with additional reading guides in the process of translation.

These resources and training initiatives are freely available on the ELSI website, reflecting Oregon's commitment to equipping early childhood professionals with the tools necessary for success in their roles.

The OPK workforce is a critical component of Oregon's early childhood education system, serving as the foundation for delivering quality care and services to families. Through efforts like the Early Learning Systems Initiative, which focuses on coaching, professional learning, and resources for educators, Oregon continues to strengthen and expand its workforce. These investments in staff diversity, compensation, and professional development ensure that OPK programs can effectively serve the needs of Oregon's youngest learners and their families.

### **OPKP-3 Technical Assistance (TA) and Workforce Development**

During the reporting period, the Infant Toddler Specialist facilitated a Community of Practice (COP) for OPKP-3 programs across Oregon. The COP convened monthly, providing a platform for collaborative discussions around shared challenges, such as recruitment, staff well-being, retention, and best practices in infant and toddler care. This group brought together participants from both home-based and center-based programs, fostering an exchange of insights and strategies to strengthen the overall quality of care provided to infants and toddlers statewide.

In addition, the ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators training program was offered to OPK staff members interested in becoming certified trainers for this curriculum. This professional development opportunity was made available at no cost to participants, ensuring equitable access to high-quality training resources for staff working with Oregon's youngest learners.

### **Critical Competencies for Infant-Toddler Educators**

The training and competencies offered focus on the essential knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support the development and well-being of infants and toddlers. This curriculum covers a wide range of competencies, including:

- Responsive caregiving
- Social-emotional development
- Health, safety, and nutrition practices
- Effective family engagement

## CLASS Partnership with TRI

The CLASS Partnership with TRI (Teaching Strategies and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System) continued to provide valuable support for OPK programs in improving the quality of early learning environments. Through this collaboration, OPK staff have had access to targeted coaching and resources aimed at enhancing the interactions between caregivers and children, fostering developmentally supportive learning environments.

## Looking Forward: New Head Start Program Performance Standards (2024)

As mentioned, OPK programs are required to comply with Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), which set the framework for operational quality and accountability. On August 21, 2024, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) published updated rules in the Federal Register, titled Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming. These changes aim to provide greater support and stability to the Head Start workforce while improving the quality of services for children and families.

### Key Updates on Salary Requirements

A central component of the updated Head Start Program Performance Standards is the inclusion of new salary requirements, designed to enhance compensation for early childhood educators and support long-term retention. The revised standards focus on gradually increasing salaries over the next several years, with the goal of aligning them more closely with those of K-12 educators. Key aspects of these updates include:

- **Teachers' Salaries:** By 2031, OPK programs must ensure that all teachers (including those with associate degrees or higher) earn salaries comparable to those of kindergarten teachers in local public schools. This initiative is aimed at reducing wage disparities between early childhood educators in Head Start programs and their counterparts in K-12 education settings. Oregon's Early Learning Council, which established salary guidelines in 2020, is well-positioned to implement these new standards. However, these guidelines will be revised to reflect post-pandemic wage increases across the state.
- **Assistants' Salaries:** Teacher assistants and similar roles will also see salary increases, ensuring fair compensation based on their education, experience, and contribution to the educational environment.
- **Progressive Implementation:** The salary increases will be implemented gradually, with a phased approach that allows OPK programs to adjust their budgets and operational strategies over time, ensuring a smooth transition to the 2031 benchmarks.
- **Equitable Compensation for All Staff:** The updated standards emphasize equitable pay across all staff members, including those involved in education, health services, family services, and program leadership. OPK programs will be required to conduct reviews and adjustments of staff salaries to ensure fair compensation that reflects the essential role each staff member plays in the success of the program.

## Focus on Equity and Fair Compensation

The updated standards prioritize equity and fair pay, addressing longstanding disparities related to gender, race, and educational background. These changes will help ensure that all staff—regardless of demographic characteristics—are compensated fairly for their contributions to early childhood education.

### Why These Changes Matter

The updated salary requirements are critical for several reasons:

- 1. Attracting and Retaining Talent:** Higher salaries are essential to attracting and retaining highly qualified early childhood educators. As early childhood education continues to be recognized for its importance, competitive compensation will help OPK programs remain a viable option for talented professionals.
- 2. Improving Program Quality:** Offering better compensation will allow OPK programs to hire and retain skilled staff, which is vital for maintaining high-quality services. Educators who are well-compensated are more likely to stay in their roles, reducing turnover and providing children with consistent, high-quality education and care.
- 3. Ensuring Fair Pay Across the Workforce:** The emphasis on equitable pay ensures that staff from diverse backgrounds receive fair compensation for their work, helping to address longstanding wage disparities and creating a more inclusive workforce.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards' updated salary requirements represent a significant shift toward improving compensation for early childhood educators in Oregon. By gradually increasing salaries to align with those of K-12 educators and ensuring equitable pay across the workforce, these changes will strengthen the OPK program. The new salary structure will help attract and retain highly qualified staff, improve program quality, and foster a more equitable and sustainable early childhood education workforce. These efforts will ultimately lead to better outcomes for children and families across the state, creating stability and enhancing the overall effectiveness of Oregon's early learning programs. In 2021-2022, fourteen percent of staff left the program, of those who left 62% and 48 % of teaching staff were replaced over the program year. Similarly, in 2022-2023, Fourteen percent of staff left the program, of those who left 50% were replaced over the program year.

## Eligibility and Access

### Key Changes in Eligibility Verification Requirements for the 2023-2025 Biennium

Starting September 1, 2024, significant updates to the Head Start Program Performance Standards will take effect, particularly in the areas of income verification and the consideration of housing and living costs in determining eligibility. These changes are designed to improve the fairness and accessibility of the Head Start program, ensuring that families facing unique or fluctuating financial circumstances are better supported.

### Key Changes Starting September 1, 2024

#### Income Verification Flexibility

OPK programs will implement greater flexibility in the types of income documentation accepted. This includes the allowance of self-attestation (a statement from the family declaring their income) under specific circumstances, such as when formal documentation is difficult to obtain. This provision will help

families in informal or gig economy work, as well as those experiencing housing instability, access services without undue barriers.

### **Incorporating Housing and Living Costs into Eligibility Determination**

OPK programs will now be required to consider housing and living costs as part of the eligibility determination process. If a family's income is just above the eligibility threshold but they face high living costs (e.g., residing in expensive areas or experiencing housing instability), these costs will be factored into their eligibility assessment. Specifically, if a family is spending more than 30% of their monthly income on living costs, these expenses can be deducted from the total income, potentially making more families eligible for the program.

### **Increased Use of Alternative Documentation**

OPK programs will also expand the range of alternative documentation accepted for income verification. This includes items such as government assistance statements (e.g., TANF, SNAP benefits), self-employment income documentation, and other relevant records. This flexibility will help accommodate a broader spectrum of families, including those with non-traditional income sources.

### **Why These Changes Are Important**

#### **Improving Access for Families in Financial Distress**

By incorporating housing and living costs, these updates provide a more holistic view of a family's financial situation. Families with incomes slightly above the eligibility threshold but facing high living costs may have previously been excluded from the program. The new regulations address this issue, offering much-needed support to families in high-cost areas, such as Multnomah County and other regions where living expenses are higher. These changes will increase access to vital services and care, helping to ensure that more families benefit from OPK programs.

#### **Ensuring Fairer Eligibility Assessments**

The flexibility in documentation and the ability to account for temporary financial hardship will ensure that families with fluctuating incomes (e.g., due to job changes, seasonal work, or gig economy employment) can still access early childhood education services. This approach ensures that children are not excluded from OPK due to financial circumstances that do not reflect their family's long-term need for assistance.

#### **Supporting Families in Unconventional Employment Situations**

The introduction of self-attestation and expanded alternative income documentation allows families in unconventional employment (e.g., gig workers, freelancers, seasonal workers) to prove their eligibility without relying on traditional income verification methods. This flexibility broadens the program's reach, ensuring that a wider variety of families can benefit from OPK services.

#### **Addressing Geographic Disparities**

The consideration of housing costs in high-cost areas addresses regional equity, ensuring that families in urban areas such as Portland and Bend, or other regions with higher living expenses, are not unfairly excluded from the program. By recognizing the unique economic challenges of these areas, the changes help level the playing field for families across the state, regardless of location.

## **Supporting Stability for Vulnerable Families**

A key aspect of the new regulations is the recognition of temporary financial hardship. By providing families the opportunity to demonstrate their eligibility based on current circumstances, OPK programs become more responsive to real-life needs. This is especially important for families experiencing transitions or hardships, offering them stability and support during difficult times.

These updates aim to make the Head Start program more accessible and equitable for all families in Oregon, particularly those facing financial instability or high living costs. The increased flexibility in income verification, coupled with the consideration of housing and living expenses, will help ensure that OPK services are available to families who need them the most, particularly those in challenging economic situations.

## **Mental Health and Disabilities**

OPK programs are designed to provide comprehensive services to children and families, including access to health and mental health services. In alignment with the updated Head Start Program Performance Standards, a multidisciplinary approach to mental health has been integrated into the OPK programs, enhancing the support provided to children, families, and staff.

### **Coordination of Multidisciplinary Staff Supports**

Programs are required to coordinate supports for adult mental health and well-being across all OPK services. This includes fostering nurturing and responsive relationships with families, engaging families in home visiting services, and prioritizing staff health and wellness. Additionally, programs are mandated to provide regular breaks for all staff members, ensuring that breaks are of adequate length and frequency based on the number of hours worked. This approach underscores the program's commitment to sustaining a healthy and effective workforce.

### **Mental Health Consultation**

Programs must ensure that mental health consultation services are available at least once a month. In cases where a dedicated mental health consultant is unavailable, programs are required to engage other certified and trained mental health professionals or behavioral health specialists to provide these services. These alternative professionals must coordinate with the mental health consultant to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of mental health support.

### **Why This Is Important**

Retaining and sustaining a qualified workforce is vital to effectively supporting the children and families served by the OPK programs. The updates to the Head Start Program Performance Standards elevate the importance of mental health integration throughout the program. By focusing on both staff well-being and children's emotional health, these updates provide clearer, more robust standards that enhance support for mental health, social/emotional wellness, and overall staff wellness.

These improvements not only strengthen the OPK workforce but also ensure that the essential program supports—critical to the success of children and families—are delivered in a more sustainable and holistic manner.



## Additional Funding Needed: Moving Forward with OPK

While recent state investments have increased access to publicly funded preschool programs, many eligible children and families still lack access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

The current per-child funding model for early learning programs is insufficient to fully support the cost of quality services and the rising operating expenses, particularly when it comes to the wages and benefits necessary to attract and retain a qualified workforce in the OPK program. OPK programs are committed to serving Oregon's most vulnerable families, but additional investment is essential to sustain these programs and maintain the level of quality required to support the children and families who need it most.

The updated Head Start Program Performance Standards have introduced increased cost considerations for OPK programming, particularly in two key areas: mental health support and staff wages.

### 1. Meeting New Mental Health Support Standards

- **Expanded Services:** The updated performance standards place significant emphasis on mental health services for both children and families. To comply with these new standards, OPK programs must integrate more comprehensive mental health services, including in-house mental health professionals or partnerships with local providers. This may include services like counseling, trauma-informed care, and early identification of mental health issues. To implement these services effectively, OPK programs will require additional funding for staff training, hiring specialized professionals, and developing tailored programs to meet the diverse needs of children and families.
- **Addressing Increased Demand:** There has been a growing recognition of the need for mental health support in early childhood programs, especially as rising rates of stress, trauma, and behavioral health issues among young children demand attention. Meeting these needs requires specialized expertise, early intervention resources, and a robust support system—all of which entail significant financial investments.
- **Program Modifications:** To comply with the updated standards, OPK programs may need to adjust or expand their infrastructure, such as creating more individualized services for children with mental health concerns or disabilities. This includes the need for additional funding to support new tools, assessments, and curricula, ensuring that staff are well-equipped to address the emotional and psychological needs of the children they serve.

### 2. Increasing Staff Wages

- **Attracting and Retaining Qualified Staff:** OPK programs rely on a skilled and dedicated workforce, but wages in early childhood education have historically been low. As the program expands its services to meet new standards, particularly in mental health and developmental support, there is an increasing demand for qualified professionals, including mental health specialists, social workers, home visitors, and early childhood educators. Competitive wages are critical to attracting and retaining these professionals, especially in a field where turnover rates are high due to low pay and increasing stress levels.
- **Ensuring Program Quality:** Increasing wages will help OPK programs recruit and retain a stable and well-trained workforce, ensuring the delivery of high-quality care and education.

Well-compensated staff are more likely to stay in the program, reducing turnover and increasing consistency in the care children receive. This continuity is crucial for meeting the new performance standards and effectively addressing children's mental health and developmental needs.

- **Cost of Living Adjustments:** OPK programs primarily serve low-income families, yet staff members often face challenges in making ends meet due to wages that do not reflect the rising cost of living. Increasing staff wages would alleviate some of this financial pressure and help maintain a consistent, qualified team, which is vital to ensuring the success of the program.

In summary, OPK programs need additional financial support to meet the new Head Start Program Performance Standards related to mental health and staff wages. These updates require additional resources, specialized training, and the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals. By investing in these areas, OPK programs can continue to provide high-quality services that meet the diverse needs of the children and families they serve.

### Excerpts from OPK Grantees Regarding Funding Needs

- **Staff Compensation:** "All OPK programs need to see increased compensation to compete with K-12 and other non-education sectors. There must also be consistency between programs with similar requirements (wages, health benefits, dental, retirement) in order to support the new Head Start Program Performance Standards salary requirements for all Head Start staff."
- **Support for Children with Special Needs:** "Additional resources are necessary to support children with special needs through low-ratio classroom settings, access to direct service special education interventions, professional development to support high-quality inclusive practices, and additional funding for education assistants to support children with severe disabilities, intensive medical needs, and significant mental health or behavioral needs."

### Investing in OPK is Investing in the Local Economy

The OPK program contributes significantly to the local economy in several key ways:

#### 1. Creating Jobs

OPK programs provide stable, well-paying employment opportunities within local communities. These positions span a wide range of roles, including teachers, home visitors, center directors, family service staff, health professionals, and administrative personnel. By offering employment in the early childhood education and social service sectors, OPK fosters job stability and supports families in the communities it serves.

#### 2. Hiring and Educating Parents

A unique feature of many OPK programs is their commitment to employing past and current parents whose children have benefited from the program. This creates a cycle of empowerment and community growth, where families not only receive services but also contribute back to their community. Nearly 50% of the workforce in some OPK programs is comprised of current or past parents, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in promoting workforce participation and family stability. Furthermore, OPK offers higher education benefits, helping parents acquire professional skills that support long-term family stability and contribute to the local educational environment.

### **3. Supporting Workforce Participation**

By providing high-quality early childhood education and comprehensive support services, OPK enables parents to participate more fully in the workforce. With the peace of mind that their children are receiving a solid foundation for success in school and life, parents are able to seek employment or advance their careers. This boosts family income, encourages career growth, and enhances overall economic stability.

### **4. Boosting Local Businesses**

The economic impact of OPK extends to local businesses. OPK employees and the families served by the program contribute to the local economy through their spending power. From everyday purchases to long-term investments in education and childcare, OPK's economic influence ripples through the community, benefiting local businesses and supporting economic growth.

### **5. Improving School Readiness**

By preparing young children for success in school, OPK plays a pivotal role in reducing the need for future remedial education services, which can be costly. When children enter kindergarten ready to learn, they are more likely to succeed academically, thus reducing future public expenditures on educational support.

### **6. Reducing Long-Term Costs**

Research demonstrates that early childhood education programs, such as OPK, generate long-term economic benefits. By improving educational outcomes, reducing crime, and promoting healthy behaviors, OPK helps lower future social service costs. This contributes to a more prosperous and sustainable local economy, reducing the need for costly interventions in the future.

### **7. Community Engagement and Development**

OPK programs often foster local partnerships with health providers, social service agencies, and local businesses. These collaborations enhance service delivery and contribute to the broader development and well-being of the community. As OPK programs grow, their ability to engage and strengthen local communities expands, creating a more connected, resilient network of support for families.

In summary, investing in OPK strengthens the local economy by fostering a skilled workforce, improving educational outcomes, and creating a supportive environment for children and families. These investments lead to both immediate and long-term economic benefits, benefiting individuals, families, and communities across Oregon.

## **More Capacity at the State Level to Support OPK Implementation**

The OPK program is a critical initiative that supports families and children during their most formative years. However, to maintain the program's effectiveness, scalability, and quality, additional staff at the state level are necessary for program administration.

### **Increased position authority for OPK support will:**

#### **1. Ensure Effective Oversight and Coordination**

As OPK continues to expand, additional dedicated staff will be essential to manage the growing number of service providers, ensure consistent program delivery across counties, and monitor compliance with state and federal regulations. This administrative capacity will improve program operations and service quality.

## **2. Improve Program Evaluation and Reporting**

With increased staffing, OPK can enhance its data collection, analysis, and reporting capabilities. This will allow for better tracking of outcomes, measurement of program impact, and identification of areas for improvement. Ultimately, this will lead to more informed decisions and more effective resource allocation.

## **3. Support Staff and Provider Relationships**

As OPK expands, fostering strong relationships with providers becomes increasingly important. Additional staff will be able to support ongoing training, communication, and collaboration to ensure that providers are well-equipped to deliver high-quality services to families.

## **4. Increase Responsiveness and Capacity**

More administrative staff will enhance the program's ability to respond to emerging challenges, new policies, and increased demand. Whether it's managing new funding opportunities, adapting to policy changes, or addressing local needs, additional staff will ensure that OPK remains flexible and effective in meeting the needs of Oregon's children and families.

## **5. Enhance Program Sustainability**

Adequate administrative support will increase efficiency, reduce staff burnout, and ensure continuity in leadership. This stability is crucial for the long-term sustainability of OPK, ensuring that the program can continue to meet the needs of future generations.

Investing in additional staff for OPK administration is vital for ensuring that Oregon continues to provide high-quality, comprehensive services to families, while also strengthening the program's overall effectiveness and sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

The OPK program plays a vital role in supporting the early development of children and strengthening families across the state. By providing high-quality early education, health services, and family support, OPK ensures that children are prepared for success in school and life. However, to continue meeting the growing demand for services and to address evolving needs—particularly in areas such as mental health support and workforce retention—additional investment is essential. By increasing funding and resources, we can ensure that OPK maintains its high standards of service and continues to positively impact the future of Oregon's children and communities.

Appendix A.

Figure A1. Ages of children enrolled in OPK

2021-2022 Source: Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2022

2022-2023 Source: Federal Head Start Enterprise System Program Information Reports 2023

